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CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS CINEMA

The *Wuxia* Tradition

STEPHEN TEO

CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS CINEMA

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The *Wuxia* Tradition

Stephen Teo

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TRADITIONS IN WORLD CINEMA

General editors: **Linda Badley and R. Barton Palmer**
Founding editor: **Steven Jay Schneider**

Traditions in World Cinema is a series of textbooks and monographs devoted to the analysis of currently popular and previously underexamined or undervalued film movements from around the globe. Also intended for general interest readers, the textbooks in this series offer undergraduate- and graduate-level film students accessible and comprehensive introductions to diverse traditions in world cinema. The monographs open up for advanced academic study more specialised groups of films, including those that require theoretically-oriented approaches. Both textbooks and monographs provide thorough examinations of the industrial, cultural, and socio-historical conditions of production and reception.

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Textbooks and monographs include:

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Monographs may additionally include:

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- Interview(s) with key filmmakers working within the tradition

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother Mary Chen Sing Chow

INTRODUCTION

The *wuxia* film is the oldest genre in the Chinese cinema that has remained popular to the present day. Yet despite its longevity, its history has barely been told until fairly recently, as if there was some force denying that it ever existed. Indeed, the genre was as good as non-existent in China, its country of birth, for some fifty years, being proscribed over that time, while in Hong Kong, where it flowered, it was generally derided by critics and largely neglected by film historians. In recent years, it has garnered a following not only among fans but serious scholars. David Bordwell, Zhang Zhen, David Desser and Leon Hunt have treated the *wuxia* film with the critical respect that it deserves, addressing it in the contexts of larger studies of Hong Kong cinema (Bordwell), the Chinese cinema (Zhang), or the generic martial arts action film and the genre known as kung fu (Desser and Hunt).[1] In China, Chen Mo and Jia Leilei have published specific histories, their books sharing the same title, 'A History of the Chinese *Wuxia* Film', both issued in 2005.[2]

This book also offers a specific history of the *wuxia* film, the first in the English language to do so. It covers the evolution and expansion of the genre from its beginnings in the early Chinese cinema based in Shanghai to its transposition to the film industries in Hong Kong and Taiwan and its eventual shift back to the Mainland in its present phase of development.

Subject and Terminology

Before beginning this history, it is necessary first to settle the question of terminology, in the process of which, the characteristics of the genre will also be

outlined. Used to refer to a type of film in the Chinese cinema since the late 1920s, *wuxia* is today an accepted and established nomenclature. However, there is no satisfactory English translation of the term, and though it is often identified as 'the swordplay film' in critical studies,[3] such a marker of *wuxia* offers only a partial definition and is therefore deficient in furthering understanding of the genre. In addition, *wuxia* is often confused with 'kung fu' and 'martial arts' such that all these terms are erroneously thought of as synonymous although there are certainly overlapping constituents between all three.

Simply put, '*wuxia*' and 'kung fu' are genre-specific terms, while 'martial arts' is a generic term to refer to any type of motion picture containing martial arts action, mostly including the martial arts of China, Korea and Japan but also Thailand and other countries in Asia. It is perhaps more useful to consider the martial arts cinema as a movement, as Jubin Hu has done.[4] As a movement rather than a genre, we can then see more clearly how it engenders the genres of *wuxia* and kung fu and influences other genres (such as the comedy and gangster film). As a movement, it is also clear that it appealed to nationalist sentiments and represented part of the 'Sinicization' of Chinese cinema in its infancy.[5] I will return to the nationalist aspects of the *wuxia* genre later.

Since this book concentrates on the *wuxia* film, it already implies a division or separation from 'kung fu', which will be defined shortly. The division is far from absolute and it must be said that kung fu evolved out of *wuxia*, forging its own style and manner of development. To appreciate their differences as well as similarities, it is necessary to break down both terms etymologically. *Wuxia* is derived from the Chinese words *wu* denoting militaristic or martial qualities, and *xia* denoting chivalry, gallantry, qualities of knighthood and heroism. It was originally coined by the Japanese as a neologism in the late Meiji period at the turn of the twentieth century. The early science-fiction writer and baseball enthusiast Shunro Oshikawa (1876–1914) first used the term in the titles of a series of militaristic adventure stories to denote militaristic virtues of heroism and gallantry, as in the title of his 1902 adventure novel, *Bukyo no Nihon* (in Chinese *Wuxia zhi Riben*, or 'Heroic Japan').[6] In a reference to Oshikawa's evocation of the word *wuxia* (or *Bukyo* in Japanese), Ikuo Abe declares that it is 'very hard to translate *Bukyo* into English, but *Bu* means samurai, and *Kyo* denotes manly character',[7] and adds that Oshikawa's *Bukyo* is closer in spirit to the militaristic ethos of the samurai code of *bushido*.[8]

Chinese writers and students studying in Japan brought the word back to their homeland in the hope that China would follow the Meiji example of adopting science and modernising the military. The word thus was in wide usage in China from the late Qing, early Republican period onwards. In the nineteenth century, the literature at the time went by the name of *xiayi* (the stress being on heroic chivalry), indicating that the shift to *wuxia* in the twentieth century was influenced by modern currents of thought putting the empha-

sis on the militaristic principles (*wu*) which had made a country like Japan a major world power.

The term *wuxia* became entrenched in the popular mind following the serialisation of the novel *Jianghu qixia zhuan* (*Legend of the Strange Swordsmen*, first serialised in 1922).[9] So entrenched has it since become in China, or the Chinese-speaking world, that it is not generally known that the word originated in Japan. The Japanese today hardly use *wuxia* (or *bukyo*) to refer to their own genre of swordfighting samurai movies, the closest equivalent to the Chinese *wuxia* movies, instead preferring the term *chambara* (an onomatopoeic comic-book-like expression deriving from the clanging of swords). Though the origin of *wuxia* may be foreign, both the words *wu* and *xia* have deep historical roots in China. Ye Hongsheng notes that the earliest reference to both *wu* and *xia* in Chinese history is in the writings of Han Fei Zi where he criticised *xia* for transgressing the law of the land for using *wu* or violence (*xia yi wu fan jin*),[10] while Wang Li asserts that in ancient Chinese usage, the single word *xia* was a virtual abbreviation of *wuxia*.[11]

As Han Fei Zi uses it, *xia* is a noun to denote a breed of male and female (in Chinese, *xia* is not gender-specific) warrior figures in the Warring States Period (403BC–221 BC) whom we may loosely call 'knights-errant', although, historically, the proper word for this is *youxia* (meaning 'wandering knight'). The title of James Liu's book *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, published in 1967, refers to the historical tradition of *xia*, although, Liu notes, the translation of *xia* as knight-errant is inadequate to completely capture the essence of *xia*. I agree with Liu that it is probably unhelpful, when writing in English, to reject the term 'knight-errant' as an approximate translation of *xia* since both are generic conceits to refer to a tradition of sword-wielding, swordfighting, horse-riding or gallivanting warrior figure who stands and fights for honour, chivalry and righteousness.[12] I will accordingly treat *xia* and the English term 'knight-errant' as interchangeable without necessarily implying or referring to the Western-European tradition of knight-errantry.[13]

The uncertainty of terminology underlines the constructed and contested nature of this whole genre, which, even in Chinese writings is a highly tenuous subject. There is no cultural consensus about *xia*. As Ye Hongsheng informs us, there have been many types of *xia* throughout Chinese historiography, from *youxia* (wandering knight), *renxia* (humane knight), *yixia* (upright knight), *haoxia* (heroic knight), *yongxia* (brave knight), *yinxia* (hermit knight), *ruxia* (Confucian knight), to *jianxia* (sword-carrying knight), *daoxia* (bandit knight), *sengxia* (monk knight), and *nüxia* (female knight).[14] The *xia* is a 'hard to define figure', as Y. W. Ma tells us, 'rendered ambiguous by the passage of time, the changing cultural and political background, the different needs of various genres, and the shifting literary taste'.[15]

While acknowledging that there is no cultural consensus, it is the task of this

book to attempt to define *wuxia* as a *cinematic genre*. As an entry point into this process, I propose to follow the method used by Chinese critics of differentiating between *wuxia* and kung fu – two intersecting cinematic genres which for all their similarities have separate specificities – by distinguishing between their fighting styles.

A cult of the sword is associated with the *wuxia* figure. Chen Shan has shown that such an association began from the dawn of the history of *xia*.[16] However, the *xia* is also adept in the use of other weapons (such as the staff or long pole) and in the art of fist-fighting or boxing, skills which are often rendered under the category of 'kung fu' (or *gongfu*, in Pinyin). Though 'kung fu' is generically used today to denote the martial arts, its literal meaning is the level of skill and finesse of technique that one has attained in any endeavour, not just the martial arts. Kung fu emphasises skill achievable through training and practice, as denoted in the word 'kung' (*gong*, meaning achievement or merit). Thus the emphasis of the kung fu film is on the martial arts while the emphasis of the *wuxia* film is chivalry and the pursuit of righteousness. The hero in kung fu films can and often does display the same dedication to chivalry and the pursuit of righteousness as the sword-wielding knight-errant, though their fighting traditions hail from different schools, namely Wudang and Shaolin.

In the popular mythology of the martial arts cinema, Wudang points to the swordplay tradition and Shaolin to the kung fu tradition, although this is not always set in iron and overlapping inevitably occurs. The former is recognised as a 'soft' school emphasising inner skills, such as the mastery of *qigong* (inner energy) that enables one to make weightless leaps and fly, while the latter is a 'hard' school emphasising the outer physical skills, the mastery of hands, legs, and other parts of one's body (even including the head) for defence or attack. The element of flight also distinguishes *wuxia* from kung fu, as Hsiao-hung Chang has noted, with the former allowing for 'phantasmagoric actions' and the latter focusing on 'real fighting on the ground'.[17]

For the purposes of this book, I will use the terminology 'martial arts cinema' to refer to both strands of *wuxia* and kung fu in that they both feature all kinds of martial arts action. But since *wuxia* refers to a *specific* martial arts genre, it therefore refers to a type of film which portrays the warrior *xia* and his or her style of swordfighting action as well as the themes and principles of *xia* (chivalry or knight-errantry). Shu Guozhi argues that the term *wuxia* is a misnomer since most novels in the genre tend to concentrate on the training and use of martial arts and not on the *xia* concept as such. He proposes that the term *wuyi* (literally, 'martial arts') should replace *wuxia*.[18] There is, however, more than one term for martial arts in Chinese. Another terminology is *wushu* which is used more commonly in the field of sports.[19] As far as the cinema is concerned, the Chinese do not generally make references to *wushu pian* or *wuyi pian* ('martial arts cinema').

A rendition closer to the meaning of martial arts cinema is *wuda pian*, literally, 'martial action cinema,' but the term can refer to both *wuxia* and non-*wuxia* films and it begs the question of just what type of martial action, and weapon, is being referred to. During the Song dynasty, literary historians subdivided martial arts fiction into categories of 'swords' (*pu dao*) and 'cudgels and staffs' (*gan bang*), that is, by the implements used in the fighting.[20] In the twentieth-century art form of cinema, subdivisions of *wuxia* and kung fu have come about, applied to martial arts films in general. Insofar as *wuxia* and kung fu denote respectively the swordplay movie and the fist-fighting movie, they can usefully be seen as two distinct but inter-related genres. Chinese critics have on the whole stuck to these distinctions.[21]

The kung fu film's emphasis is on the training and techniques of martial arts. Thus the fighting styles (primarily fist-fighting but also leg-kicking and even head-butting) differ from those of *wuxia* though the heroes of both espouse *xia* principles. The Wong Fei-hung (in pinyin Huang Feihong) series in the 1950s Hong Kong cinema is now taken as the paradigm of a *wuxia* hero forging his own line of kung fu techniques that are somehow different from *wuxia* styles of combat. The most important qualification of kung fu was its claim of realism as a reaction against the fantastic premise of *wuxia* (this will be examined in Chapter 3). This implies that the nature of *wuxia* is more abstract and philosophical in terms of its application of concepts such as chivalry, altruism, justice and righteousness (all of which come under the rubric of *xia*), while kung fu apparently emphasises the *actual and pragmatic* application of combat techniques as well as the training.

There is furthermore a north–south divide that distinguish *wuxia* from kung fu, pointing to the different sources of their origins in Wudang (a northern school) and Shaolin (a southern school, or at least, the school of Shaolin martial arts that was largely disseminated in southern China following the destruction of the northern Shaolin temple and the dispersal of its adherents to the south, according to cinematic legend[22]). Such divisions were most likely appropriated from the *wuxia* literature of the so-called 'Guangdong School' in the 1930s which gave rise to the Wong Fei-hung phenomenon and which can be differentiated from the literature of the Old School, written by essentially northern writers.[23] The division of Old School and New School literature will be dealt with in Chapter 2. *Wuxia* is in the main a Mandarin genre, while kung fu is a Cantonese one ('kung fu' in fact is Cantonese and the use of the term automatically acknowledges that kung fu is acknowledged as a Cantonese, thus Southern, tendency in the martial arts).

There are, in addition, distinguishing features in terms of periods and settings. To some Chinese critics, *wuxia* is now inseparable from the period-costume movie (*guzhuang pian*),[24] though in its early development, the *wuxia* film was not necessarily thought of as a period film. Dai Jinhua tends to see

wuxia films as a sub-type within the generic form of the 'historical film' or *guzhuang baishi pian* (classical-costumed tales of anecdotal history) which took their ancient stories from popular tradition.[25] The settings of *wuxia* films are now regarded as almost exclusively historical or mythical, reinforcing the Mandarin cinema's tendency to invoke ancient China more naturally and successfully. One reason for the ancient settings, according to the screenwriter Liu Tianci, is to accentuate the qualities of myth and magic.[26] The kung fu picture is usually more modern and less historical though the genre can include the historical costume movie (usually late Qing dynasty). Kung fu films are also usually but not always set in southern China (and then, almost always Guangdong province) in the time of the early Republican period beginning in 1911.

Historically, the *wuxia* form was the earliest type of martial arts cinema and kung fu was a later development, associated with the Hong Kong cinema. My account will include aspects of the kung fu form as it emerged more firmly in Hong Kong beginning in the 1950s, and developed in the 1970s and 1980s to the extent that it supplanted the *wuxia* film and became a separate genre. The history of the kung fu film is much more recent and is not so much in need of urgent retelling. In any case, it is a saga well covered by others, notably by Leon Hunt in his book *Kung Fu Cult Masters*. Though Hunt's book acknowledges the presence of *wuxia*, it treats the kung fu film as the dominant martial arts cinema and does not give any historical account of the *wuxia* film nor dwell in depth on its relationship with kung fu. Hunt offers a vision of kung fu as a modern, transnational, avidly cross-cultural, genre with a large fan base around the world. As a result, though perhaps unintentionally, the *wuxia* film is regarded more like an abstract and inaccessible subset of the kung fu genre. My book acknowledges the kung fu film as a part of the tradition of *wuxia* but it is the latter which is the primary subject and the key to the martial arts cinema.

Wuxia Historicism and Nationalism

The impression of *wuxia* as a parochial, old-country, China-centric genre is no doubt an outcome of its overwhelming reliance on, and exploitation of, history, historiography, and historicism. History is an interminable feature and characteristic of the genre and of Chinese literary culture in general. This pre-eminence of history has a 'quasi-religious' ring to it, as Andrew Plaks has noted, emphasising that there is a 'noticeable preponderance of historical subjects and historiographical format in Chinese fiction'.[27] The *wuxia* genre is a microcosm of this larger reliance on history and historiography in Chinese fiction, but though this 'quasi-religious pre-eminence of history' in the genre is apparent, I suggest that the genre transmutes history and engenders a historicism. First, this implies a theoretical movement of history subjected to conditions of change and trans-

formation; second, it also involves a mechanistic adherence to the religion of history (history-worship, so to speak).

History is a natural resource of historicism, and truth and fiction are embedded in the practice of historiography. The historiography of *wuxia* perpetuates the notion of history in the making, or history denominating action. The *xia* or knight-errant acts as an agent of history, conscious of his or her role in shaping events and the destiny of the nation, for example, by assassinating a tyrant. This is the theme of Zhang Yimou's *Yingxiong* (*Hero*, 2002) and many other *wuxia* films. Zhang's *wuxia* films also show the aesthetic facet of historicism in that they exhibit history as fashion and architecture (this will be discussed in Chapter 7).

Historicism also refers to the nature of the knight-errant as dictated by past traditions. Some of these traditions, as Y. W. Ma has elucidated them, include

> the image of female knights-errant from Tang (dynasty) tales, . . . the readers' expectations of the knight-errant (valour, deadly fighting skills, sense of justice, and the like), . . . the stylistic and contextual features required of the genre (action-packed episodes, black-and-white contrasts between heroes and villains, etc) and . . . the availability of stock motifs (for instance, the invariable majestic appearance of the knight-errant) and stock situations (like establishing credentials through combat).[28]

Ma's list of traditions offers only a guideline to the genre's stylistic characteristics which are formed by historicism. While in essence, the nature of the genre is best expressed through *xia* or the chivalrous behaviour of the knight-errant, chivalry can involve other themes such as revenge (*baochou*) and the just or unjust use of violence. Jian Zhao points out that the concept of *bao* (reciprocation or reprisal) developed as an 'important ethic' from the *xia* tradition in the Spring and Autumn period (Chunqiu) and that the knights-errant carried the tradition into the Han period during which the historian Sima Qian praised the *xia* as personalities of heroic virtue.[29] Later literature such as *Wuyue chunqiu* (*Annals of the Wu and Yue in the Spring and Autumn Period*) and the *Yue jue shu* (*The Book of the End of the Kingdom of Yue*) developed the thread of revenge as a common theme.[30]

Karl Kao has examined the concepts of *bao* and *baoying* (retribution) as motor forces of narrative causality in *wuxia* fiction.[31] Revenge therefore motivates martial arts action and brings about the idea of redemption. Chen Pingyuan states that the development of twentieth-century *wuxia* literature has relied on the dramatizing of, first, the *jianghu* (literally 'rivers and lakes', an anarchic domain with its own codes and laws in which knights-errant roam and operate and commit acts of violence based on revenge), second, martial arts action, and third, Buddhist concepts.[32] One could say that without revenge, all

three elements would be meaningless. Violence and revenge form an unbreakable thread of the historicist fabric of *xia* literature, adjusting and adapting to historical circumstances as well as to the various forms of artistic apparatus and conceptual frameworks.

While I account for the historicism of the *wuxia* genre, my counterintuitive proposition is that a genre that possesses flexibility in spite of its limitations will survive the buffeting of social, political and technological forces. My research will show that the genre has consistently rebounded against its historicist expectations due to the circumstances of political and social transformations. The genre is unified by its cultural history and its historicism but at the same time is ruptured and torn apart from its historical continuity by history itself, which is far from a smooth process, and by the interruptions of outside forces (chiefly, the influences of foreign genres).

In writing this history, I seek to deconstruct the genre from a New Historicist point of view so as to formulate a critique by grasping its multiple facets of constructed identity and history. The genre is constructed from multiple strands of thought and approaches, including historicism, nationalism, transnationalism and orientalism. I will throughout this book bring up all these issues though I may not always deal with all of them at the same time. Orientalism, for example, will be discussed more fully in Chapter 7 in connection with the analysis of *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon* and *Hero*. Both films were transnational successes and it is within this context that I have focused on orientalism. Effectively, orientalism (or self-orientalism) is a methodology exploited by Chinese filmmakers themselves to sell the *wuxia* film, but more broadly, I seek to understand how the genre is constructed historically in the cinema as a product through interrelated motifs that might be seen as counterpoints to each other in a symphony of the martial arts – orientalism as a counterpoint to historicism, transnationalism as a counterpoint to nationalism. On the whole, historicism and nationalism are the primary motifs in this symphony.

The *wuxia* film was and is regarded as a national form, fulfilling nationalist desires for self-strengthening at a time when China was weak. In the present, as China has become a rising power on the world stage, the *wuxia* film seems to have become an instrument of the state: *wuxia* as a means to maintain the myth of a warrior tradition and its historicist concepts of chivalry and knight-errantry in order to justify the modern concept of the nation-state. Zhang Yimou's *Hero* is exemplary of this kind of state-minded historicism. However, the historicism of a film like *Hero* is not to be confused with historicity. The genre is informed by history and historicism just as it appears to maintain both as essentialist traits. To a degree, this study of *wuxia* overturns the word 'essentialism' from being currently a term of discredit to one worthy of respect in critical discourse. This is because essentialism must perforce be historicised and contextualised. In the same way, nationalism must also be historicised, and in

fact the history of the genre demonstrates that nationalism and transnationalism often seemed to march in step.

Wuxia as Transnationalist Impulse

Transnationalism suggests that the genre had to re-fashion itself to suit modern commercial imperatives as an entertainment form while satisfying historicist and nationalist inclinations – an attempt to 'reconnect the past with the present on a simultaneous plane', as Zhang Zhen has described it.[33] Zhang sees the development of the genre within the prism of modernity, 'in particular the question of science and its bearing on the magical new art of cinema in the Chinese context'.[34] Modernity and the martial arts cinema of which *wuxia* and kung fu are two traditional forms are closely entangled, but to what extent did the cinema manifest modernisation through the adoption of traditional genres? Paul Pickowicz makes the interesting claim that filmmakers, unlike their counterparts in the May Fourth literature movement, 'did not have to make any emotionally wrenching transitions simply because there was no Chinese tradition of filmmaking to reject', and for this reason, 'early Chinese cinema was more thoroughly modern than May Fourth fiction'.[35] However, modernity in the eyes of many Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth movement was a necessary factor in the strengthening of China and it was in this way conflated with nationalism.

In constructing a national cinema, Chinese filmmakers were complicit in building a modern nation – and the modern nation, as Prasenjit Duara reminds us, 'does not contain only modern elements'.[36] Jubin Hu has located the whole movement of martial arts filmmaking into a phase of 'industrial nationalism'.[37] Thus the interlinking of nationalism with modernity and industry suggests a far from straight path of development. As the Chinese cinema in the 1920s was still a developing model, the national and the modern combines the urge for self-sufficiency with the search for a system of self-signification. The national was to be articulated through native, traditional genres. Within *wuxia* literature itself, it has long been the practice to regard *xia* as a concept often equivalent to a declaration of the national, best represented by a line in one of author Jin Yong's novels, 'the apex of *xia* is to serve the nation and the people' (*weiguo weimin, xia zhi da zhe*).[38] Variations or similar expressions of such a line are found throughout the *wuxia* genre as well as the latter-day kung fu film.

However, the national is subjected to social and political transformations. Though the *wuxia* genre stems from a long history of Chinese tradition and culture, it also tended to be derided by intellectuals, not least by the May Fourth literati. To the critics, the genre betrayed a basic inconsistency between modernity and tradition, between the outlaw-rebel status of its heroes and the conformist tendencies of the old world Confucianist societies they were meant to

protect. Weihong Bao makes the crucial point that the technological magic achieved by the genre 'posed a threat to the nationalization and modernization agendas upheld by cultural forces from the right and the left', which was why it was eventually banned in 1931, though the actual reason invoked was superstition.[39]

Yet the genre in the cinema was a manifestation of modernity in that it abstracted reality. Chinese intellectuals condemned the genre because they saw it as divorced from reality. As Theodore Huters has noted of the intellectual literary scene in China during that era, Chinese intellectuals, such as the writer Lu Xun, were tied to the 'Chinese conservative ethos that an idea cannot serve both as an indicator of a particular social reality and at the same time as an abstraction from reality'.[40] *Wuxia* cinema was an abstraction from reality which also served to cast a light on social reality. This was a very modern idea that could not have been accepted by the intellectuals. *Wuxia* abstracted nationalism even as it served to display the national through its very historicism – and nationalism was transmuted by the impulse and the impact of transnationalism.

The *wuxia* genre's representation of the national was mediated not only through a native genre but also through its relationship with transnational forces and the global influence of Hollywood. Zhang Zhen states that the martial arts film 'stems from a promiscuous family tree that complicates any facile definition of the genre as such'.[41] It also complicates any facile definition of the Chinese national cinema within the terms of the genre itself, because the national was from the beginning related to the transnational. Here we might more profitably engage with Jubin Hu's notion of 'industrial nationalism' in that the Chinese cinema was preoccupied with establishing itself as a *film industry* (Hu's emphasis) that would need markets to expand and survive.[42]

Where the 'industrial nationalism' of the burgeoning Shanghai film industry was concerned, it was intermixed right from the start with the notion of transnationalism. Extant examples of early *wuxia* films, such as *Hong xia* (*The Red Heroine*, 1929), display idiosyncratic glimpses of early Chinese filmmakers feeding upon Hollywood and other Western cinemas even as they draw on indigenous traditions. Many early *wuxia* films were nothing more than imitations of the western, the swashbuckler, or the European medieval romance even though *wuxia* was meant to countervail these genres.[43] Weihong Bao has traced the vernacular influence of Hollywood's Pearl White serials on the evolution of the female knight-errant figure in early Chinese cinema.

However, all such influences today and even at the time appear caricatured (one reason why it was viewed contemptuously by the literary critics), leaving the impression that some essentialist feature of the genre was missing or was barely touched upon, as if proving the law of genre, as expounded by Derrida, that where genres mix or intermix, they tend to confirm some 'essential purity of their identity'.[44] The growth of the Chinese cinema was due to the *huaqiao*

(overseas Chinese), as Lu Xun reported in one of his essays: 'whenever there was a new film released, the old would bring their grandchildren to the cinema and point to the screen, saying "look here, this is how our people in the mother country look like"'.[45] From this quote, we can discern the cultural essentialism that was a part of how Chinese filmmakers balanced the national and the transnational. Yet this essentialism may not have been as potent if it was not associated with the essentialism of another medium – cinema.

Wuxia's Cinematic Appeal

In the course of its development, *wuxia* has responded to trends and mutations as well as to challenges and debates over its own tendencies towards fantasy and wishful thinking, and it has successfully crossed over media, from literature to cinema to television to video games. In the cinema, the *wuxia* genre itself can be said to be schizophrenic. An early association with the historical period-costume film (*guzhuang pian*) evolved into further associations with another genre, *shenguai*, which has historical literary roots as deep as *wuxia*. *Shenguai* denotes gods and spirits (*shen*) and the strange and the bizarre (*guai*: which could also refer to monsters and creatures of legend and the imagination). *Wuxia*'s integration with *shenguai* and its absorption and imitation of foreign genres, which is discussed in depth in Chapter 2, attest to my central proposition that the genre was highly adaptable in spite of its historicist roots.

The basic nature of *wuxia shenguai* can be compared with the fairy story in the West, which became a form in the silent cinema that Vachel Lindsay called 'the pictures of Fairy Splendour'.[46] The genre might have been the Chinese cinema's first model of the fairy picture – and 'fairy splendour' is perhaps the key to its cinematic appeal. The magical properties of *shenguai* revealed through the technology of special effects inform the chivalric sensibility of *wuxia*, which fundamentally make the genre a purely *cinematic* attraction. The genre remains relevant to this very day because it exhibits a natural correlation with the film medium – that through the medium of film, it makes the impossible real. Without the intrusion of an antithesis between fantasy and reality, the *wuxia shenguai* genre is probably irrelevant to cinema and would have remained primarily a literary vehicle.

The other part of the genre's *cinematic* appeal is the feature of the body, by which I mean the purely physical qualities of action sequences involving choreography, training, and expertise. The martial arts can be treated as a dance form, and as early as 1948, Maya Deren's short film *Meditation on Violence* demonstrated this facility. The film shows a performer (actor Chao-li Chi) executing martial arts movements based on traditional Wudang and Shaolin styles. First, he dances against an interior background accompanied by the sound of oriental flute music. The sudden onset of Haitian drum music magnifies the more violent

strokes and movements of the performer. There is a cut to exterior. The performer now clad in costume and holding a sword performs the 'Wudang' section of the choreography. Occasionally, the performer appears to be fighting with the camera. Freeze frames punctuate the sequence. Then, the action runs back in reverse. There is a cut back to the interior, with the same performer, naked to the waist, performing his Shaolin kung fu moves shown earlier.

Meditation on Violence is one of the earliest films made in the US to feature martial arts as dance choreography and on hindsight, looks like a precursor of many of the martial arts films coming out of Hong Kong. The aesthetic intensity of the choreography prefigures the styles of King Hu and Lau Kar-leong, two Hong Kong directors whose works are now regarded as classics of choreographed martial arts; but perhaps more importantly, *Meditation* shows that the martial arts can be interpreted from a feminine perspective. Though the martial arts is generally assumed to be dominated by men, the *wuxia* film, with its concentration of the softer values of Wudang, contains a feminine sensibility that was brought out explicitly in the films of King Hu, particularly *Xianü* (*A Touch of Zen*), originally released in two instalments in 1970 and 1971. The figure of the female knight-errant drives the narrative and determines its style and sensibility (choreographic, web-like, metaphysical), rendering the film a true 'meditation on violence' (Hu's films will be discussed in Chapter 5). As for violence and its association with masculinity, the films of Zhang Che offer their own form of meditation (discussed in Chapter 4).

The direction set by *A Touch of Zen* was followed by *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), whose international success has brought the *wuxia* movie into the contemporary era of globalisation. That the *wuxia* movie has a global appeal is both a source of satisfaction and apprehension. How will the genre shape up in the arena of East – West cultural exchange? Does it foreshadow a major reconfiguration of historicist structures? How do we interpret the cultural referents of this globalised *wuxia* genre? The following history is designed as a resource that will offer the reader some possible responses to these questions, for in themselves, the questions hinge on a proper and comprehensive understanding of the genre's rich and multifaceted history.

Chapter Divisions

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the genre's antecedents and its beginnings in the silent Shanghai cinema; the growth in popularity of the genre; the craze of the *shenguai wuxia* serial and the resulting controversy over its tendencies of superstition and 'feudal thinking'. Chapter 2 tackles the issue of censorship following a backlash against the genre; the consequences of the ban on *wuxia* film are examined and the chapter also looks at the genre's brief period of grace in the *gudao* period from 1937 to 1941 during which *wuxia* reappeared in the film

industry functioning under wartime circumstances. Chapter 3 examines how Hong Kong inherited the *wuxia* genre in the form of the kung fu cinema which emerged in the 1950s; the chapter explores the nationalistic impulses of kung fu as manifested through the screen identities of Wong Fei-hung and Bruce Lee.

Chapter 4 focuses on the resurgence of *wuxia* through the label of the 'new school' in the 1960s; the *wuxia* films of the two major Mandarin studios, Shaw Brothers and Cathay, are reviewed in order to explore how they interpreted the new school conventions of realism and heroism; the chapter also contains an extensive discussion on the work of one of the key directors of the new school, Zhang Che. Chapter 5 is devoted to an analysis of King Hu's films and his interpretation of the female knight-errant figure. Chapter 6 recounts the development of the genre post-*A Touch of Zen* and its influence on the films of director Chu Yuan and the Hong Kong New Wave; the rise of the New Wave engendered postmodernist versions of *wuxia* films, typified by the works of Tsui Hark, Patrick Tam, and Wong Kar-wai. Finally, Chapter 7 brings the genre up to the present, with analyses of the implications of the transnational success of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, its evocation of orientalism and its impact on subsequent developments in the genre exemplified by such attempts as Zhang Yimou's *Hero* to follow on the same transnational-orientalist path to sell *wuxia* to global audiences; *Hero* is also dissected for its perceived nationalistic stance working apparently as a parallel concern along with its transnational objective. The chapter examines the development of the genre as it journeys back to China, the land of its birth, and how it progresses along the twin tracks of nationalism and transnationalism.

A word about transliteration: all Chinese names, terms, and titles of films and other textual citations quoted in the text and footnotes are transliterated according to the Pinyin system. An exception is made for Cantonese names in reference to the Hong Kong cinema, which are transliterated according to their Cantonese pronunciation (for example, 'Wong Fei-hung' or 'kung fu' rather than 'Huang Feihong' and 'gongfu'). This is done so that a distinction is made between Mandarin and Cantonese, and between the Chinese cinema and the Hong Kong cinema. A further exception is also made for Mandarin names in reference to Taiwan, which adheres to the Wade – Giles system of transliteration.

All quoted passages from original Chinese language sources which are not available in English are my own translations.

Notes

1. See David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2000); Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema 1896–1937* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005): David Desser, 'The Kung Fu Craze: Hong Kong Cinema's First American Reception', in Poshek Fu and David Desser (ed.), *The Cinema of Hong Kong:*

History, Arts, Identity (Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Leon Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003).

2. See Chen Mo, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi* ('A History of the Chinese *Wuxia* Film') (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), and Jia Leilei, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi* ('A History of the Chinese *Wuxia* Film') (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2005).
3. See, for example, Lau Shing-hon (ed.), *A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film, 1945–1980* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1981).
4. See Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), p. 48.
5. Ibid., p. 48.
6. See Ye Hongsheng, *Lun jian: wuxia xiaoshuo tanyi lu* ('Discourse on the Sword: A Record of the Art of *Wuxia* Novels') (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1997), p. 9.
7. See Ikuo Abe, 'Muscular Christianity in Japan: The Growth of a Hybrid', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23:5, August 2006, 714–738, esp. p. 725. Abe's attempts to translate the words can only be regarded as Japanese contextual approximations of the original Chinese terms for *wu* and *xia*, which I have already defined in the main text.
8. Ibid., p. 725. Abe refers to the '*Bushido* of the *Gunjin Chokuyu* (Imperial Instructions for Soldiers)' which was issued by the Emperor Meiji in 1882 as a set of 'behaviourial norms for soldiers of the imperial military forces'. See p. 726. For more on the historical precepts of *bushido*, see Alain Silver, *The Samurai Film* (Bromley, Kent: Columbus Books, 1983), pp. 19–27.
9. See Po Fung (Pu Feng), 'Dai jian chumen de ren, tan jige wuxia pian de jichu gainian' ('Persons Who Travel with Swords: Basic Concepts in the *Wuxia* Film'), in Bryan Chang (Zhang Weihong) (ed.), *Jianghu weiding* ('The Undecided *Jianghu*') (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Critics Society, 2002), pp. 9–39, esp. p. 12.
10. Ye Hongsheng, *Lun jian*, p. 4. See also Lin Baochun, 'Cong youxia, shaoxia, jianxia dao yixia: Zhongguo gudai xiayi guannian de yanbian' ('From Wandering Knight, Young Knight, Sword-carrying Knight to the Righteous Knight: The Evolution of the *Xiayi* Concept in Ancient China'), in Tamkang University Chinese Faculty (ed.), *Xia yu Zhongguo wenhua* ('*Xia* and Chinese Culture') (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1993), pp. 91–130, esp. p. 92. The Han Fei Zi quotation comes from his text 'The Five Vermin' ('Wu du'). For a standard English translation of Han Fei Zi, see Burton Watson, *Han Fei Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
11. See the Preface to Wang Li, *Wuxia wenhua tonglun* ('*A* General Treatise on Wuxia Culture') (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005), p. 3.
12. See James Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), p. xii.
13. Y. W. Ma also makes the same point in his essay, 'The Knight-Errant in *Hua-pen* Stories', *T'oung Pao*, 61, 1975, 266–300, see p. 268.
14. Ye Hongsheng, *Lun jian*, p. 9.
15. Y. W. Ma, 'The Knight-Errant in *Hua-pen* Stories', p. 266.
16. See Chen Shan, *Zhongguo wuxia shi* ('*A* History of Wuxia in China') (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 1992), pp. 5–10.
17. See Hsiao-hung Chang, 'The unbearable lightness of globalization', in Darrell William Davis and Ru-Shou Robert Chen (ed.), *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 95–107, esp. p. 98.
18. See Shu Guozhi, *Du Jin Yong oude* ('Some Insights on Reading Jin Yong') (Taipei: Yuanliu, 2007, 3rd edn), p. 24.

19. Leon Hunt points out that *wushu* was the name used by the People's Republic after it was established by Mao to specify traditional martial arts as a national sport, as part of a programme of national health. See Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters*, p. 31. John Christopher Hamm evokes another term *guoshu* (literally, 'national arts'), which, he explains, is 'a term inherited from the Republican era and enshrining that period's project of reinventing martial traditions in the service of nationalistic self-strengthening'. See Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), p. 8.
20. See James Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, p. 107.
21. See Lau Shing-hon, *Dianying fubixing ji* ('The Poetic Meaning of Cinema') (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1991), p. 259. Lau curated two separate retrospectives for the Hong Kong International Film Festival in 1980 and 1981, respectively devoted to the kung fu film and the swordplay film. See Lau (ed.), *A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1980), and Lau (ed.), *A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film*.
22. For a historical account of the Shaolin Temple, see Meir Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion and the Chinese Martial Arts* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).
23. For more on the Guangdong school, see Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen*, pp. 32–48. See also Ye Hongsheng, *Lun jian*, pp. 47–48.
24. See Chen Mo, *Daoguang xiaying mengtaiqi – Zhongguo wuxia dianying lun* ('Montage of Swordplay and Swordfighters: A Treatise on Chinese Martial Arts Cinema') (Beijing: China Film Publications, 1996), p. 83.
25. See Dai Jinhua, 'Order/Anti-Order: Representation of Identity in Hong Kong Action Movies', in Meaghan Morris, Siu -Leung Li and Stephen Chan (ed.), *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), pp. 81–94.
26. See Liu Tianci, *Wuxia bianju miji* ('The Secrets of Writing *Wuxia* Scripts') (Hong Kong: Ciwenhua, 1996).
27. Andrew H. Plaks, 'Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative' in Plaks (ed.), *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 309–352, Eps. p. 312.
28. Y. W. Ma, 'The Knight-Errant in *Hua-pen* Stories', p. 299.
29. See Jian Zhao, 'From History to Historical Romance: Xia Imagery in the Late Han Era', *NUCB JLCC*, 5:2, 2003, 81–88, Eps. p. 84.
30. Ibid., p. 84.
31. See Karl S. Y. Kao, '*Bao* and *Baoying*: Narrative Causality and External Motivations in Chinese Fiction', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 11, December 1989, 115–138.
32. Chen Pingyuan, *Qiangu wenren xiake meng* ('The Literati's Chivalric Dreams: Narrative Models of Chinese Knight-Errant Literature') (Taipei: Rye Field Publishing, 1995), p. 108.
33. Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, p. 200.
34. Ibid., p. 200.
35. See Paul G. Pickowicz, 'Melodramatic Representation and the "May Fourth" Tradition of Chinese Cinema', in Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang (ed.), *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth Century China* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 295–326, Eps. p. 297.
36. Prasenjit Duara, 'Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity: The Campaigns against Popular Religion in Early Twentieth-Century China', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 50:1, February 1991, 67–83, esp. p. 68.

37. See the chapter 'Industrial Nationalism (1921–1930)', in Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, pp. 47–74.
38. The line is uttered by Guo Jing in the novel *Shendiao xialü* ('The Giant Eagle and its Companion'). See John Christopher Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen*, p. 108. See also Han Yunbo, *Zhongguo xia wenhua: Jidian yu chengchuan* ('Chinese *Xia* Culture: Residue and Heritage') (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2004), pp. 10–11.
39. See Weihong Bao, 'From Pearl White to White Rose Woo: Tracing the Vernacular Body of *Nüxia* in Chinese Silent Cinema, 1927–1931', *Camera Obscura*, 60, 20:3, 2005, 193–231, esp. p. 206.
40. See Theodore Huters, 'A New Way of Writing: The Possibilities for Literature in Late Qing China, 1895–1908', *Modern China*, 14:3, July 1988, 243–276, esp. p. 270.
41. Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, p. 200.
42. See Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, p. 48.
43. Intellectual critics of the period criticised the fact that Chinese films were far too prone to imitating foreign swashbucklers and cited this as one of the reasons why Chinese national cinema 'did not take off'. See Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying wenhua shi 1905–2004* ('History of Chinese Film Culture 1905–2004') (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), p. 91. Li cites Hong Shui, 'Guochan dianying bu fada de genben yuanyin' ('The Basic Reason Why Chinese Films Do Not Take Off'), in *Yingxi shenghuo*, 1:31, August 1931.
44. See Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', *Critical Inquiry*, 7:1, Autumn 1980, 55–81, esp. p. 57.
45. See Lu Xun, 'Luelun Zhongguo ren de lian' ('A Brief Discussion on Chinese Face'), in *Lu Xun zagan xuanji* ('Lu Xun Anthology: Random Thoughts') (Beijing: Jiefang jun wenyi chuban she, 2000), pp. 136–139, Eps. p. 139.
46. See Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: MacMillan and Company, 1922), p. 30.

1. *WUXIA* FROM LITERATURE TO CINEMA

This chapter recounts the literary antecedents of *wuxia*, examining the ideals and characteristics of Chinese knight-errantry as they have passed down through historical records and fiction, before proceeding to a review of the *wuxia* literature of the early twentieth century which directly preceded the cinematic genre and helped to bring about its birth. The cinema in turn has become a major historiographic apparatus of the *wuxia* genre, creating new filmic texts often to support and bolster the literary opuses on which directors and screenwriters had drawn. I explore the beginnings of the cinematic genre in the Shanghai film industry, tracing its growth through the early studio system of production and its culmination, four short years later, as the genre fell out of favour with intellectuals and the government, which then declared a ban on the genre.

Literary and Philosophical Traditions

The literary and philosophical antecedents from whence the character of *xia* was derived may be traced as far back as the Warring States period (403–221 BCE) and perhaps as early as the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 BCE). But it was not until the time of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) that a substantive history of the lives and traditions of *xia* was written. Sima Qian's *Shi ji* (*Records of History*[1]), written between 104–91 BCE during the reign of Han Wudi (the 'Martial Emperor') contains two chapters, 'Biographies of Knights-Errant' ('Youxia liezhuan'), and 'Biographies of the Assassins' ('Cike liezhuan'),

which are usually cited as the historical records of remarkable personalities broadly described as *xia* and their feats of chivalry and loyalty in the Warring States and Qin periods.

Sima Qian described *xia* as members of a plebeian class hailing from 'humble alleys' and wearing 'common clothes'. In the Warring States period, this class included the likes of robbers and brigands, soldiers and freethinkers who were untenured warriors sometimes referred to as 'private swords' (*sijian*). In the Qin period (221–207 BCE), *xia* included political assassins sympathetic to righteous ministers or politicians trying to rid states of tyrants. Sima Qian noted that such men treated status and wealth lightly and were not afraid to die. They flouted authority, were loyal to friends and helped the poor and the oppressed.

Knights-errant upheld a code of professional ethics associated with the principles of the major philosophical schools during the Warring States period, principally Confucianism and Mohism. In the preamble to 'Biographies of Knights-Errant', Sima Qian identified righteousness (*yi*), trust (*xin*), meritorious service (*gong*), tidiness (*jie*), and tolerance (*rang*), as the ethical principles guiding the behaviour of *xia*.[2] Of all these principles, *yi* is the most mentioned in the mythology of *xia* as expounded in literature and in the cinema. The term *xiayi*, combining chivalry with righteousness, which James Liu defines as 'altruism',[3] is the motivating principle behind the knight-errant's mission to do good deeds, and to act from a sense of justice (*xingxia zhangyi*).

Xu Sinian has noted that in the Confucianist tradition, knights-errant act on the principle of *yi* largely as a bulwark against the notion of *li*, or self-profit.[4] Knight-errantry in its Confucianist spirit presupposes chivalry, altruism, benevolence and justice for the common good. In opposition to the Confucianists, the Mohists integrated *yi* with the concept of *li*, treating *yi* in terms of self-benefit.[5] The founding philosopher, Mo Zi, preached all-embracing love (*jian ai*): to regard others as one would regard oneself.[6] The Mohists embraced the idea of the chivalry of knight-errantry as a means towards achieving all-embracing love and organised themselves into a private army headed by a 'Great Master' (in Chinese: *juzi*) with authority of life or death over his members.[7] Some historians consider this the origin of the *jianghu*.[8]

Interpretations of *jianghu* are many,[9] but essentially, it refers to an abstract entity which can mirror the real world in which *xia* and their code of conduct are put into operation. As Hamm has elucidated, the *jianghu* can be concretised in 'the complex of inns, highways and waterways, deserted temples, bandits' lairs, and stretches of wilderness at the geographic and moral margins of settled society'.[10] They imply an illicit space nurtured by conflict and corruption, but functioning as an 'alternate society'. Chen Pingyuan gives two meanings of *jianghu*: 1 a secret society within the real world that exists in opposition with the government, 2 a semi-Utopia where *xia* are free to defy authority and act on their conscience to punish evil and exalt goodness.[11] In the practices of the

Mohists, the historical evidence suggests that *jianghu* was constituted as a super organisation or secret society. To the Mohists, violence was entirely compatible with chivalry, and *xia* could legitimately use violence to achieve the aim of all-embracing love.[12]

The actions and principles of *xia* came under attack from the Legalist philosopher Han Fei Zi, who lived in the waning years of the Warring States period. He asserted that *xia* were selfish individuals operating a private code of *yi* (*si yi*). Han Fei Zi also castigated *xia* for their violence and lawlessness, and because people followed them, they were responsible for propagating a culture of outlawry and anarchy.[13] Han Fei Zi's famous critique that 'knights-errant transgress the law with violence' (*xia yi wu fan jin*) has resonated among *wuxia* detractors through the ages. Sima Qian's view of *xia* was more sympathetic. He thought their actions worthy of moral commendation, and indeed, that their conformity to a professional code of ethics had produced a *xia* morality. The private code of righteous behaviour (*si yi*) was not a self-serving morality but rather the conduct of a gentleman acting alone for the benefit of others. The private nature of *xia* stemmed from his disgust of the elite and his empathy with the lower classes.[14]

Sima Qian praised knights-errant for their steadfastness and bravery, emphasising deeds over words.

> They always mean what they say, always accomplish what they set out to do, and always fulfil their promises. They rush to the aid of other men in distress without giving a thought to their own safety. They do not boast of their ability and would be ashamed to brag of their benevolence.[15]

Sima Qian defended *xia* on their use of violence and their lawlessness. The breakdown of the imperial houses during the Warring States period had resulted in a perpetual state of political chaos and anarchy. The people could not count on the rule of law. In such situations, *xia* resorted to violence as the only way to ensure justice and defending the common people against tyrants and warlords.

Sima Qian's critical endorsement of knights-errant and their role in history have exerted a strong influence on the development of later literature in China. *Shi ji* was not only the first comprehensive history of China ever written, it was also, as C. T. Hsia tells us, the 'noblest monument of classical narrative prose' which latter writers used as a standard to judge the excellence of their own novels.[16] *Xia* literature as contained in the anthologies *Wuyue chunqiu* and the *Yue jue shu* of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE), and the *chuanqi* or prose romances of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), were often based on the records of historical knights-errant in Sima Qian's biographies.

The *chuanqi* stories spawned their own legendary figures including the Curly-Bearded Stranger (Qiu Ran), the Kunlun Slave, Nie Yinniang, and the Red-Thread

Lady (Hongxian nü) – the latter two being the earliest literary incarnations of *nüxia* (female knights-errant) who would be romanticised in latter Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) fiction, exemplified by Wen Kang's *Ernü yingxiong zhuan* ('A Tale of Heroic Lovers'), first published in 1878, and in twentieth-century fiction, as in Wang Dulu's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

The military romance also developed from the time of the Tang dynasty and became a popular form in the Song dynasty (960–1279). Classics such as *San guo yanyi* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) and *Shuihu zhuan* (*The Water Margin*) are military romances-cum-tales of chivalry, celebrating historical personages and events set against the backdrop of 'a large scale campaign or a series of such campaigns'.[17] The central characters of *Romance* were famous generals or soldiers possessing exceptional fighting abilities (sometimes aided by supernatural forces) and superior grasp of military strategy.

The Water Margin in particular established the literary formula emulated by later writers whereby righteous men choose to become outlaws rather than serve under corrupt administrations. The episodic sketchings of each individual character and their adventures are prototypical and in the episodes we see the seeds of the fighting styles and mannerisms of latter *wuxia* characters. The novel was published in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), but versions of the so-called 'Liangshanpo outlaws' (Liangshanpo referred to the mountain base of the rebels who rose up against the government) were already well known from the Song dynasty and popular stories about the outlaws began circulating into subsequent eras. Thus, Hu Shi called *The Water Margin* a crystallisation of 400 years of 'Liangshanpo stories'.[18] It possessed such a subversive, revolutionary appeal to Han Chinese readers that it was banned during the Qing dynasty.[19]

During the Song Dynasty, *wuxia* fiction was disseminated in the form of storytelling prompt books, known as *huaben*. This tradition continued well into the Qing period, until another form of *wuxia* fiction known as the 'Public Case' (*gongan*) novels became popular in the nineteenth century. The *gongan* novels were written according to a formula of adventure, gallant deeds and the solving of a plot involving murder or a conspiracy. Several knights-errant, or a central hero who could be a judge, are moved by an unjust act done to an innocent party and go about uncovering the perpetrator of the act and dealing him his just deserts. In some respects, this kind of fiction took on the quality of a whodunit and, as a result, was called 'detective novels'.[20]

The theme of chivalry and altruism marked such so-called detective fiction, made apparent in the titles of a series of novels containing the words *xia* and *yi*, as in *Sanxia wuyi* (*The Three Heroes and the Five Gallants*), and a latter version entitled *Qixia wuyi* (*The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*). The *xiayi* or heroic chivalry fiction took on the currents of a movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century, following the popularity of *Ernü yingxiong zhuan* (*A Tale of Heroic Lovers*) which centred on a female knight-errant named

Thirteenth Sister, an archetype that distils earlier visions of female knight-errant figures who have appeared in *wuxia* literature (I will discuss the female knight-errant figure in more detail in Chapter 7).

The chief characteristic of *xiayi* fiction was a blend of action and romance, revolving around either female knight-errant figures or feminised or semi-feminised male heroes who proved irresistible to women. A typical hero of this type was romantic-sentimental as well as a highly skilled fighter, as exemplified by Wen Suchen, the central character of the late eighteenth-century novel *Yesou puyan* ('The Humble Words of an Old Rustic'). Wen displayed the traits of masculine sexual prowess on top of his other abilities in the military and civil spheres.[21] Such a literary prototype would prove to be an important one when filmmakers considered adopting it for the cinema (see the section on Zhang Che in Chapter 4).

In *xiayi* fiction, the romantic male hero became an entrenched archetype while his skills as a fighter become more and more fantastic. The *xiayi* fiction depicted the supernaturalistic abilities of knights-errant to vault over walls and fly over rooftops. According to Hsia, the *gongan* sub-genre of *xiayi* fiction gradually 'took over the supernatural aspects of the military romance in accordance with its own evolving conventions', and the *gongan* novel itself became a tradition wedded to twentieth-century *wuxia* fiction (Hsia reckons that the actual *wuxia* trend began with the publication of *Sanxia wuyi*/ *The Three Heroes and the Five Gallants*).[22]

The fantastic strand of *wuxia* fiction was inherited also from the genre of the ghost story and tales of the strange, exemplified by the eighteenth-century anthology entitled *Liaozhai zhiyi* (translated into English as *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* by Herbert Giles), authored by Pu Songling. *Liaozhai* was a rich source of *wuxia* stories for Chinese filmmakers in the twentieth century, and it yielded the one veritable masterpiece of the *wuxia* genre in the Chinese cinema, King Hu's *A Touch of Zen*, based on the story 'Xianü' (indicating a chivalric female knight-errant). Pu Songling styled himself a 'historian of the strange' (in Chinese, *yishi shi*),[23] and it is the strange and fantastic world of *wuxia*, marked by flying knights-errant both male and female, that the cinema has manifested particularly well.

Wuxia Literature in the Twentieth Century

The *wuxia* fiction of the twentieth century has been categorised by scholars into the old school (*jiupai*), referring essentially to the fiction published under the Republic of China regime from 1911 to 1949, and the new school (*xinpai*), referring to the fiction published in Hong Kong in the 1950s as China, under communist rule, continued to frown upon the genre and limit its distribution in the Mainland. These labels denote the regional and political differences of

the two schools rather than artistic disparity between them, as Chen Pingyuan has noted.[24]

However, the two labels have become entrenched in *wuxia* scholarship in the latter half of the twentieth century and Mainland scholars have since regarded the new school literature of Jin Yong and Liang Yusheng as forming an inherent part of their own tradition. The renewed popularity of new school literature in China has led to the emergence in the twenty-first century of a younger breed of writers in China who see themselves as inheritors of the 'new *wuxia*' (*xin wuxia*) as the Mainlanders tend to call the 'new school'. With the re-establishment of *wuxia* as a legitimate genre in China, some scholars, such as Xu Sinian, have maintained that there is a need to examine the characteristics and historical status of the Republican era's *wuxia* literature. Xu notes that the old school distinction is useful not only to distinguish between the Mainland and Hong Kong-Taiwan but also to distinguish between *wuxia* literature and the new literature of the May Fourth Movement.[25]

Many *wuxia* fiction writers in the early twentieth century began writing before the 1919 May Fourth movement, making their names mostly in love stories in the genre known as *yuanyang hudie* (Butterfly and Mandarin Duck), a type of fiction aping classical romances and featuring effeminate male heroes romancing tender young women, with the stories usually ending tragically. However, old school martial arts fiction was mostly written during or after the May Fourth movement. The literature grew in popularity in the 1920s, with the publication of Pingjiang Buxiaosheng's *Jianghu qixia zhuan* (*Legend of the Strange Swordsmen*, first serialised 1922), Zhao Huanting's *Qixia jingzhong zhuan* (*The Valiant History of the Strange Knights-Errant*, published 1923), and Gu Mingdao's *Huangjiang nüxia* (*Lady Swordfighter of the South*, published 1929). The labelling of this fiction as 'old school' illustrated the fact that the genre was not recognised as being congruent with the modern, new style fiction of the May Fourth literary movement based on contemporary themes and drawing on social and political currents.

For example, while May Fourth literature spoke of opposition to feudalism and the need for progressive thinking, supernaturalism and fantasy remained embedded in *wuxia* fiction of the period, particularly the novels of Huanzhu Louzhu ('Master of the Pavilion of the Returned Pearl': the *nom de plume* for author Li Shoumin [1902–1962]). Huanzhu's novels depict *xia* as gods and spirits dwelling in caves and mountains, as in his most representative work *Shushan jianxia* (*The Chivalrous Swordsmen of the Szechwan Mountains*), which describes creatures and demons battling mortal heroes engaged in a Homer-like quest for gods and spirits to impose law and order on a chaotic and strife-torn earth – this was the basis of Tsui Hark's *Shushan jianxia* (Zu: *Warriors from the Magic Mountain*, 1983) and its sequel *Shushan zhengzhuan* (*The Legend of* Zu, 2001). The basis of the genre in the historicist traditions

of fantasy gave rise to the feeling that it was beyond the pale of the May Fourth Movement.

As to the literary differences between the old school and the new school, some scholars have detected ideological and artistic variations, as the following passage from a Chinese anthology of the genre demonstrates:

> On the artistic level, the new school lays a greater emphasis on descriptions of characters with the objective of enriching and drawing out their ideological emotions and inner contradictions. It also strives after a complicated and winding plot structure, each linking episode containing specific and detailed descriptions of plot development. . . . The tendency of the old school to simply assemble several independent stories into one long novel is no longer a tendency of the new school. . . . Certain novels of the old school have inherited the techniques of the detective novel. In the new school, similar novels have achieved an intimate fusion between *wuxia* and the deductive school of detective fiction. This aside, certain new school writers have adopted European phrases and European-American styles, an unprecedented practice that was never a part of the old school. In short, the new school *wuxia* novel has made substantial progress artistically and this tendency looks like it could continue into the future.[26]

Despite perceived distinctions that the old school is more traditional and the new school is libertarian and open to Western concepts, Chen Pingyuan has preferred a diachronic approach of viewing both schools as belonging to 'the same developmental process of *wuxia* literature, from the 1920s to the 1980s'.[27] According to such a view, a writer such as Wang Dulu (1909–1977), known today as the original author of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, bridges both the old and the new schools. New school writers such as Jin Yong and Liang Yusheng are as prone as the old school writers to impute values of history and traditional knight-errantry and to invoke magic and fantasy. The novels of both Jin Yong and Liang Yusheng are also full of romantic-tragic knights-errant which are seemingly old school figures.

From about 1927 onwards, the Shanghai film industry began to take a leaf out of the publishing world's practice of serialising *wuxia* novels by adopting the same practice for the cinema, effectively 'picturising' *wuxia* novels. The popularisation of the genre was due to the symbiotic relationship between authors and the commercial publishing industry, both pandering to the Chinese public's idolisation of *xia* and their habit of reading long-winded and involved narratives.[28] The demands of the market prodded authors who had not previously written *wuxia* novels to write exclusively in the genre. The commercialism of the market produced a fundamental contradiction with the authors' tendencies towards literariness, but the authors and the commercial

publishing industry made mutual adjustments and artistic compromises so that the genre thrived.[29]

Beginnings in the Shanghai Cinema

The origins of the martial arts cinema can be traced to the first costume pictures (*guzhuang pian*) ever produced in China. Chen Mo has argued a case for considering *Dingjun shan* (*Dingjun Mountain*, 1905), the first Chinese film ever made by Chinese artists, as a martial arts picture.[30] This consisted of three scenes, all shot outdoors, of a Chinese opera performed by the opera star Tan Xinpei. By rights, the film should be considered an opera film, but Chen argues that being a silent film, there is not a note of opera sung in the picture and that the three segments all show Tan Xinpei in martial-dress regalia performing sword choreography and acrobatic fighting acts. Subsequently, a series of films comprising opera style martial art extracts were produced, all of which could similarly be regarded as primitive martial arts pictures.

These experiments led early Chinese filmmakers inexorably to found an industry making films on a commercial basis. The actor-director Zheng Junli, in a synoptic history of Chinese cinema published in 1936, described the burgeoning Chinese film industry from 1909–1921 as a 'sprouting forth period'.[31] The main genres were actuality films, slapstick comedies and adaptations of *wenming xi* ('civilised drama'). In the early 1920s, several studios, including Mingxing (Star Motion Picture Company), Shanghai Photoplay Company, and Great Wall were established. The success of Mingxing's *Guer jiu zu ji* (*Orphan Saves His Grandfather*, 1923) initiated a cycle of 'society films' (*shehui yingpian*), a contemporary genre dealing with social issues. The genre petered out in the middle of the decade when the ancient-costume film (*guzhuang pian*) became popular.[32] The company that initiated this genre was the Tianyi (Unique) Company, established in 1925.

The *guzhuang* genre was influenced by Western costume pictures and adventure epics, particularly the swashbucklers of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr, *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), *The Three Musketeers* (1921), *Robin Hood* (1922), *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), *The Black Pirate* (1926), all of which were popular with Chinese audiences. Chinese filmmakers attempted to cash in on the popularity by creating a Chinese equivalent of these same genres. Zheng Junli described these swashbucklers as Hollywood's equivalents of '*wuxia shenguai* pictures' and their influence on the *wuxia* genre 'was undeniable' as was the fact that Fairbanks Sr had ingrained himself as a 'hero' into the hearts of Chinese audiences.[33]

Tianyi produced the first *wuxia* picture so acknowledged by film historians *Nüxia Li Feifei* (*Lady Knight Li Feifei*), released in 1925. Beijing Opera diva Fen Juhua played the eponymous lady knight and became the first of the lady

knights in the Chinese cinema. As with much of the output in the genre, the film is now lost. Zheng Junli called it a love story that was a 'straightforward imitation of the ancients'. A young couple in love are torn apart by a marriage broker and the machinations of parents, but they finally tie the knot with the intervention of the lady knight Li Feifei.[34]

The evidence suggests that *Lady Knight Li Feifei* is a costume picture. Though the *wuxia* picture is often a costume picture, the reverse does not necessarily apply. The costume genre took on a genre identity of its own as filmmakers reached into the repertoire of classical Chinese subjects from literature, opera, and the oral narrative tradition with music accompaniment known as *tanci* to cull suitable stories for adaptation to cinema. The genre evolved from *baishi pian* (meaning films based on popular accounts of history), which came into fashion also around the mid-1920s. The term referred to films adapted from classical novels, legends, and traditional performing arts.[35] Though *baishi pian* were historical in theme and content, they were not necessarily dressed in ancient costumes. Characters could appear in modern-dress to perform a historical story.

The Tianyi studio specialised in making costume subjects and later *wuxia* films. Its founding principles were to espouse 'old moral values, old family ethics, with the aim of carrying on Chinese civilisation and strongly rebuff Westernisation.'[36] Jay Leyda tells us that Shao Zuiweng (also known as Shao Renjie or Runje Shaw), the eldest of the fabled Shaw Brothers and founder of Tianyi, looked for classical subjects based on Buddhist literature to sustain the *guzhuang* cycle.[37] During 1926, Shao made ten films of classical subjects whose immediate success forced all studios to follow suit.

Tianyi's major competitor, Mingxing, was at this time concentrating on contemporary dramas with social themes and romantic melodramas of the Butterfly and Mandarin Duck school. Another competitor, Da Zhonghua Baihe Film Company (Great China Lilium), was immersed in so-called 'Europeanised' (*ouhua*) films, showing the lifestyles and values of the upper crust of Chinese society in urban Shanghai. Tianyi's *guzhuang* pictures were designed as a reaction against *ouhua* movies. They put forward traditional Chinese values, so that younger generations could know that the Chinese too possessed, as critics would argue, their own 'extraordinarily valiant and heroic nationalism.'[38] Other critics thought that the *guzhuang* film could echo imported foreign historical films. Thus, the historical costume genre could function as a medium for disseminating traditional Chinese culture while offering comparisons with and choices over the foreign import.

Tianyi's campaign of *guzhuang pian* reached a peak in the spring of 1927. A critic at the time likened the spread of the genre to the cholera epidemic that broke out in China in the summer of 1926.[39] Historical-costume films were doing such brisk business in the *nanyang* ('southern ocean', a term referring to

the littoral states surrounding the South China Sea and thus essentially referring to Southeast Asia) that all other studios fell over themselves to produce costumers using allegedly crude, slipshod production standards.[40] The films paid no attention to historical authenticity or getting right the details of period, costumes, sets and props. Critics also saw the genre as a regressive force that went against the spirit of progress and social change.[41] Something had to be done to reenergise the costume picture, and according to Li Daoxin, *wuxia* was the answer. It was the 'added attraction' put into the *guzhuang pian* which had grown stale from repetition and slipshoddiness. Movie companies began to transform the historical costume film by inserting martial arts and *shenguai* elements, and even at times, to make 'modern *wuxia shenguai*' films as a way of getting out of the *guzhuang* genre altogether.[42]

Thus the *wuxia* picture in the 1920s was not necessarily a costume picture nor did it always contain swordplay. Chinese scholars and the early filmmakers took a broad concept of *wuxia* where the forms of history and genre do not have to merge. Films set in contemporary periods featuring a Robin Hood-type figure who steals from the rich to help the poor, were regarded as *wuxia pian*, defined purely in terms of the chivalric concept of *xia*.

Chinese film historians regard the 1922 *Hongfen kulou* (rendered by Leyda as *Vampire's Prey*[43] but also known as *Beauty and Skeletons*; the film also went by the alternative title of *Shi zimei/Ten Sisters*), as an early manifestation of the *wuxia* picture.[44] Though *Vampire's Prey* was set in the modern day, the director Guan Haifeng wanted to make a movie evoking elements of the *wuxia* genre.[45] The plot concerned a gang specialising in insurance scams. A female member of the gang kidnaps a young doctor in a park, right in front of his fiancée who mistakenly thinks that the woman has seduced him. The distraught fiancée returns home and cries on the shoulder of her brother, a police detective. His suspicions aroused, the detective investigates. Meanwhile the young man is being slowly poisoned to death so that the gang can collect on his life policy.[46] What director Guan Haifeng referred to as '*wuxia* elements' in the film were scenes of action involving police in full uniform 'fighting members of the gang with real swords and guns' while rescuing the kidnapped doctor.[47]

The development of a genuine Chinese costume genre and the rise of the *wuxia shenguai* picture did not mean that such genres were immune from foreign influences. The Da Zhonghua Baihe Company's policy of 'Europeanisation' was applied even to its *wuxia* products. An advertisement for a '*xiayi* romance blockbuster' entitled *Rexue yuanyang* (*The Ardent Couple*), printed in the film magazine *Dianying yuebao* ('Film Monthly') in December 1928, shows illustrations indicating a mock-Mountie Western, with its lead characters dressed in cowboy hats, checked shirts, neck scarves and jodhpurs. Going by the evidence of *The Red Heroine*, a production of the Youlian Studio

released in 1929, the *wuxia shenguai* genre also dabbled in a reverse form of orientalism. Characters are dressed in a medley of exotic ancient-costume styles. The period is indistinct though the setting is a Chinese village invaded by a 'Western' army whose commanding general is dressed in a costume of dappled designs and beaded patterns, with a pleated hoop for a hat (roughly evoking perhaps Middle-Eastern or South Asian motifs). His soldiers, on the other hand, wear European-style musketeer costumes and cavalier hats.

The Development of *Wuxia* Shenguai

By 1927, *guzhuang pian* was receding in popularity but its formula of historical-classical subjects would evolve into the conventions of the *wuxia* picture, and this in turn developed into the combined *wuxia shenguai* picture. The chronology of the evolution of *wuxia shenguai* is a matter of some confusion. Did the *wuxia* picture appear first without elements of *shenguai*, or did the *shenguai* picture appear first without *wuxia* elements? Chinese film historians Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin have asserted that *shenguai* and *wuxia* were two different genres.[48] They made the following distinctions. *Wuxia* expresses the warrior's lifestyle, his struggle against local tyrants and corrupt officials, and his fight for justice. The *wuxia* picture on its own has the potential to be a medium for raising and spreading revolution or social consciousness. The *shenguai* picture, on the other hand, contains gods and demons as chief protagonists, is 'detached from nature, its progress not limited by the laws of nature or the limitations of cause and effect.' [49]

The *shenguai* genre also became popular at around the time of the *wuxia* genre, thus again begging the question of which came first. Zheng Junli refers to *Pansi dong* (*Voyage to the Western World* aka, *The Cave of Silken Coil*), released in 1927, as the first 'unadulterated' *shenguai* movie.[50] The film was an adaptation of an episode from the classic *shenguai* novel *Xiyou ji* (*Pilgrimage to the West,* aka *Monkey*). It is possible to see the *shenguai* genre as an intermediate form between the *guzhuang* and the *wuxia* genres. In Zheng Junli's view, the *shenguai* picture never truly evolved into a solo genre; it was always combined with either the *guzhuang* genre or with the *wuxia* genre.[51] Another critic, writing in 1927, identified two types of *guzhuang* films: one type belonging to the *shenguai* genre, while the other type was rooted more solidly in historical folklore.[52]

The *guzhuang* genre shifted its focus from historical subjects based on popular anecdotes (the *baishi* tradition) to adaptations of classical *shenguai* novels such as *Pilgrimage to the West*, *Fengshen bang* (*Canonisation of the Gods*), and *Liaozhai zhiyi* (*Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*). When the *wuxia* picture became popular, the *shenguai* elements attached themselves to the main theme of knight-errantry or chivalry (*xia*), and the marriage proved

to be compatible insofar as knights-errant could be invested with supernatural powers in their quest for justice and order in a chaotic world.

In fact, literary scholars have pointed out a close association between *shenguai* and the early 'military romances' (the forerunners of *wuxia* fiction) and fantasy. It was also argued that *shenguai* elements transformed the *wuxia* genre into a more cinematic form, and that it was natural for the cinema to adopt fantasy.[53] Zheng Junli asserted that *shenguai* pictures were a product of the 'possibility of cinematic expression' and that their starting point was the Méliès experiments with camera trickery at the turn of the twentieth century.[54] Evoking references to such Western fantasy equivalents as Peter Pan and the Arabian Nights fantasies, some Chinese filmmakers believed that 'fantasy' would render a greater service to the public than either a harmful historical play or a contemporary play.

> We believe that films based on *shenguai* sources are much better in expressing art than all other forms of drama because they are strange as well as fantastical; possessing new things, new lives, new ideas which we cannot imagine even in our dreams.[55]

However, the combination of fantasy and the *wuxia* picture eventually became a millstone for the genre, as detractors attacked it for purveying feudalism, superstition and anti-scientific thought. Such abominations were thought to stem primarily from *shenguai*. Detractors claimed that *wuxia* could no longer preserve its inherent realism or revolutionary nature and therefore had degenerated into 'a heretic genre that poisoned the masses.'[56] Cheng Xiaoqing, in a 1927 article entitled 'My View on *Shenguai* Movies' emphasised that China lacked a scientific paradigm due to its humanist outlook. Such an outlook stressed the individual's mental well-being rather than his scientific or rational state of mind, and this explained why China had a more ingrained tradition of fantasy than the West.[57]

The May Fourth Movement itself propagated the idea that democracy and science would make China a modern nation. It also brought about a new wave of literature written in the vernacular style (*baihua*). Stories were disseminated to the literate masses through the practice of serialised publishing. Both the vernacular style and the practice of serialised publishing were the means by which *wuxia* fiction became popular. This gave rise to a paradox. Though the young and educated were attracted to *shenguai* and *wuxia* literature, the impact of the progressive and modern-scientistic ideas promoted by the May Fourth Movement produced a backlash against the genre's supernaturalism and fantastic premises.

The genre was generally described as '*wuxia shenguai*' by the early 1930s, meant in a derogatory sense to denote the 'harmful' components of fantasy in

the combined genre. *Shenguai* is, in this case, used as an adjective to qualify *wuxia*; whereas other scholars in reversing the order of the sequence (namely, *wuxia shenguai*) tend to interpret the genre in a more calibrated sense as 'films about knights-errant, immortals and ghosts'.[58] Used by detractors, the term '*wuxia shenguai*' indicated contempt mixed with shame that took on social and even political dimensions. The genre was regarded as a mishmash of superstition, feudalism, knight-errantry, heroism and militarism – an unholy concoction which induced escapism in the audience when China was in the midst of a political crisis in 1931–1932. Henceforth, I will refer to the genre generally as *wuxia shenguai* to signify its existence as a single genre containing both elements of fantasy and swordplay. In time, the word *shenguai* was dropped, as the fantasy element became such an inherent part of the *wuxia* genre that there was no need to qualify it.

A closer look at the *guzhuang pian* in its mature stage of development around 1926–1927 indicates that there was already a tendency to combine different genres to make up a distinct genre. An example may be seen in an extant though incompletely preserved work: *Xixiang ji* (*Romance of the West Chamber*, 1927), a *guzhuang pian* which contains elements of *wuxia shenguai*. Produced by Minxin (China Sun Motion Picture Company), the film is based on the famous Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) drama by Wang Shifu.[59] A scholar, Zhang Gong, goes on a study retreat in a temple only to fall in love with the prime minister's daughter, Cui Yingying, who happens to be staying in the temple's western chamber. A bandit, Sun Feihu, besieges the temple, demanding Cui Yingying as a bridal hostage. Zhang Gong extracts a promise from Yingying's mother that if he can prevent the daughter from falling into the hands of the bandit, she will be given to him in marriage.

From its source as a historical costume melodrama, the film transforms into a martial arts fantasy though this is clearly depicted as a dream sequence. The scholar-hero picks up a writing brush to use as his weapon when the bandit appears in the dream to kidnap Yingying.[60] The brush expands into a flying broom, and functions as a weapon smearing the bandit's face with ink. In creating this sequence, Hou Yao, the director, regarded the classical drama of *Romance of the West Chamber* as 'a castle in the air, an idealized world' that could only be appreciated as a synthetic beauty, not for 'scientific, archaeological or analytical study.'[61] 'Romance' was one of the earliest Chinese films to be exported to the West, under the title *Way Down West*.[62] The extant five-reel version was cut down from the original ten-reel version, apparently to highlight extended swordplay and dream sequences.[63]

'Romance' was released just one year short of the picture considered by critics to be the one classic work that launched the cinema of phantasm and swordplay. This was *Huoshao Honglian si* (*Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*), adapted from Pingjiang Buxiaosheng's novel *Legend of the Strange*

Swordsman, first serialised in 1922. Produced by Mingxing (the Star Motion Picture Company), the largest of the studios in Shanghai, the first episode was released in 1928. Zhang Shichuan directed the picture from a script by his partner, Zheng Zhengqiu. The original first episode ran for three weeks to full houses at Shanghai's Zhongyang (Palace Theatre). Zhang quickly proceeded to make a second episode, and then a third, all released in 1928. The success of these three episodes launched the martial arts picture as a serial format.

The Burning Revolution

The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple ran for eighteen instalments between 1928 and 1931. It inspired imitations containing the rubric of 'burning' (*huoshao*) in all the titles so that a sub-category of 'Burning' films was created. At this point, before examining the original 'Burning' films, it is helpful to consider both the contemporary explanations of the phenomenon and some of the historical circumstances of its emergence. The *guzhuang* picture and its interrelated genres, *shenguai* and *wuxia*, came into popularity at a critical moment in modern Chinese history – during the Guomindang (GMD)'s forceful unification of the country in 1926–1927 and the coup against its communist allies known as the April 12 Incident of 1927.

Critics in China toeing the official left-wing ideological line usually put the rise of the *wuxia* picture against the backdrop of these currents of politics, stressing that the cinema should reinvent itself along the socio-political realities of the times. The *wuxia* genre was usually found wanting in all respects of political and social engagement. The GMD coup resulted in disillusionment among the left wing of the country in general. It was argued that the population had turned to *wuxia* as a form of wish-fulfilment: the exploits of the fictional *wuxia* heroes were 'providing the enjoyment of vicarious victories where real-life victories were impossible.'[64]

Another perspective was provided by critics writing in the film magazine *Yinxing* (*Silver Star*) who called for a new doctrine in cinema based on a humanitarian perspective of heroism à la Romain Rolland. The doctrine was named New Heroism (*xin yingxiong zhuyi*).[65] The editor of *Yinxing*, Lu Mengshu, expounded its principles as follows: 'to excel oneself, do away with the habit of following old customs, cowardly actions, and corrupt thinking; to ignore one's own self-interests and make sacrifices for the sake of humanity.'[66]

New Heroism arose in film circles in 1926 when the country was inspired by the Northern Expedition as the final realisation of Sun Yat-sen's dream of unifying the country. The doctrine 'was a composite modernist discourse interwoven with a class-conscious social critique and a nationalist emphasis on Chinese cinema',[67] which floated the idea of protagonists as heroes who could lead the nation out of its weak state, improve people's lives and bring them happiness.[68]

The *wuxia* genre was a natural heroic genre that could fit the concept of New Heroism like a glove. At the same time, martial arts heroes could be useful in emphasising military over civilian affairs; they could bring back a military tradition (*shangwu*) that had long disappeared in China.

The rhetoric of New Heroism in the late 1920s decried the weakness of the Chinese people in comparison with foreign nations. China was the 'sick man of Asia'. It was felt that while European countries and the United States esteemed militaristic culture and heroes, China had venerated the civilian man of letters. The heroes in Chinese artistic works were always the literati but now it was time for warrior-heroes to return to centre stage. The enthusiasm for heroes and military values had reached the stage where proponents of *wuxia* films were actively encouraging actors to 'learn boxing and all kinds of martial arts . . . to express heroism.'[69] Accordingly, Chen Zhiqing, who wrote the first article propounding New Heroism in 1926, himself wrote a script for a *wuxia* picture *Daxia Gan Fengchi* (*The Hero Gan Fengchi*, 1928), which was praised for its 'emphasis on the military spirit and its suggestion that the people should never put on a show of weakness.'[70]

Apart from the historical-political currents, the proliferation of *wuxia* literature, particularly in the popular press through the practice of serialised publishing (and publications of comic strips), was also a major factor influencing the rise of the cinematic genre. In considering how the cinema came to absorb literary genres, we might briefly look at the partnership between Zheng Zhengqiu and Zhang Shichuan, the writer and director respectively of *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*. Both men came from the theatre, staging *wenming xi*. They founded the Mingxing Company and made their first hit *Orphan Saves His Grandfather* in 1923. Zheng Zhengqiu has been called the 'father of Chinese cinema' as a tribute to his pioneering work to wean Chinese cinema from *wenming xi* and making the transition from short films to long narrative features. Zheng realised that if Chinese cinema did not make long narrative fiction films, the fight for a local audience would be lost.[71] His partnership with Zhang Shichuan, a producer-director-entrepreneur, represented 'the desire of the first generation of Chinese filmmakers to reconcile art with profit, craftsmanship with technology.'[72] The partnership yielded some of the most profitable films for Chinese cinema in the 1920s. It is significant that these films were genre films (Butterfly and Mandarin Duck romances, and *wuxia shenguai* pictures) with established traditions in literature.

In adapting Pingjiang Buxiaosheng's novel, Zheng and Zhang exercised artistic licence that would characterise future cinematic adaptations of *wuxia* novels. Zhang said,

> I had a script when making the first episode, but we couldn't wait to make the second episode and we simply put aside the novel and worked

> completely with our own imagination and did as we pleased with the surviving characters from the first episode. We shot up to the first half (of the second episode) and I myself didn't even know what was going to happen in the second half.[73]

Since the complete series is lost (reportedly, only fragments from the first episode have survived in poor condition and are kept under storage in the Beijing Film Archive), we must rely on published accounts of the plot. The synoptic description published in the memoirs of Robert Kung (or Gong Jianong, to use his Chinese name), one of the original players in the cast, is most often quoted:

> For generations, the families of both clans have fought over a patch of ground dividing their counties. Local governments proved helpless in coming up with solutions, the chiefs of each successive administration always ended up besieged by the local clans and were invariably drawn into the whirlpool. With no one able to stop it, the feud became fiercer and fiercer. Each side hired top hands from the circles of martial arts to assist. . . . After suffering a massive defeat, the Lu clan dispatches its youngest member, Xiaoqing, to learn the martial arts from the master of the Kunlun School. Having received his full instructions, Xiaoqing sets off to return home. He loses his way in the forest on the night of the Autumn Moon Festival. The next day, following the directions of a villager, he comes to the Red Lotus Temple to put up for the night but accidentally discovers that the temple is laden with traps. Once in a while, naked women would appear and depart . . . [74]

The young hero exercises his training in *qing gong* (the skill of applying weightlessness) to escape incarceration and finally allies himself with a group of other young heroes to rescue the provincial governor imprisoned inside the Red Lotus Temple. At the orders of the governor, the Red Lotus Temple is put to the torch. Thus ends Episode One. In Episode Two, the errant monks of Red Lotus Temple escape and throw in their lot with the villain Gan Liuzi ('Sweet Tumour'), to plot their revenge.

By all accounts, the basis of the genre's popularity in cinema was its depictions of supernatural feats of 'flying sword combat, escape by stealth and other means of subterfuge achieved by cinematographic special effects.'[75] 'The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple' utilised the early process shots known as the Williams shot to depict characters achieving a transmigratory separation of body and soul.[76] Hand-drawn animated special effects were employed to simulate 'laser-light swords in magical combat'; and wires were used to suspend actors to suggest 'flights in the sky choked with fog.'[77] A critic of the period wrote: 'These wonderful special effects contributed by our own Chinese filmmakers constitute an exceptional achievement, alongside which

they perform the meritorious service of stimulating the citizenry towards the militaristic spirit.'[78]

The success of the film sparked off roughshod imitations, as well as a cult. Audiences reputedly put up incense altars before the cinema to pray to the gods before watching the film, and young people were reported to be so affected that they 'left their homes and took to the hills, heading to Mount Emei in Sichuan Province in search of immortals to teach them the supernatural arts.'[79] The writer and literary historian Zheng Zhenfeng recounts several such incidents. To Zheng, the movies constituted 'a new and sharp tool of "civilisation" used to transmit the force of *wuxia* philosophy, more directly, widely and greatly than the novel ever could'.[80] The *Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* series amply demonstrated the power of the movies for good and for bad. As He Xiujun, Zhang Shichuan's widow, wrote much later, the films 'made a lot of money for the Mingxing Company but inflicted great harm on young minds'.[81]

In the next chapter, we will look at how the genre caused moral panic in the country such that it became the target of censorship. Because of its associations with tradition, superstition, and its tinges of folk religion and cult worship, the genre was an easy target because it was never taken seriously as literature and would not be taken seriously as cinema.[82]

Notes

1. For an English translation of *Shi ji*, see Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1961), in two volumes.
2. See Xu Sinian, *Xia de zongji: Zhongguo wuxia xiaoshuo shilun* ('Trail of the Knight-Errant: A History of Chinese *Wuxia* Literature') (Beijing: People's Literature Press, 1995), pp. 22–23.
3. See James Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, p. 4.
4. Xu Sinian, *Xia de zongji*, p. 23.
5. Ibid., p. 23.
6. See Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), pp. 53–55.
7. See Ye Hongsheng, *Lun jian*, p. 8. See also Han Yunbo, *Zhongguo xia wenhua*, p. 12.
8. See Cai Xiang, *Xia yu yi: Wuxia xiaoshuo yu Zhongguo wenhua* ('Xia and Yi: *Wuxia* Literature and Chinese Culture') (Beijing: October Arts Press, 1993), p. 4.
9. For multiple interpretations of *jianghu*, see Liu Tianci, *Wuxia bianju miji*, pp. 118–145.
10. John Christopher Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen*, p. 17.
11. Chen Pingyuan, *Qiangu wenren xiake meng*, p. 108.
12. See Han Yunbo, *Zhongguo xia wenhua*, p. 12.
13. Han Fei Zi, 'The Five Venoms'.
14. Xu Sinian, *Xia de zongji*, p. 23.
15. Quotes from Sima Qian's preamble translated by James Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, pp. 14–15.
16. C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 14.

17. C. T. Hsia, 'The Military Romance: A Genre of Chinese Fiction,' in Cyril Birch (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1974), p. 339.
18. See Hu Shi, *Zhongguo zhanghui xiaoshuo kaozheng* ('Textual Criticism of the Chinese Serial Novel') (Shanghai shudian, 1980; reprint of original 1942 publication), p. 9.
19. See Jean Chesneaux, 'The Modern Relevance of Shui-hu Chuan: Its Influence on Rebel Movements in 19th and 20th Century China', *Papers on Far Eastern History*, No. 3, March 1971, 1–25, esp. p. 2.
20. See Lu Xun's description of this genre of fiction in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (translation of the author's *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe*) (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1982), pp. 336–351. For an account of *gongan* fiction before and after it became wedded to the *xiayi* form, see Y. W. Ma, 'Kung-an Fiction: A Historical and Critical Introduction', *T'oung Pao*, Vol. 65, 4–5, 1979, pp. 200–259.
21. See Martin Huang, 'From Caizi to Yingxiong: Imagining Masculinities in Two Qing Novels, "Yesou puyan" and "Sanfen mengquan zhuan"', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, Vol. 25, December 2003, 59–98, esp. pp. 73–76.
22. C. T. Hsia, 'The Military Romance', p. 384.
23. See Judith T. Zeitlin's *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).
24. Chen Pingyuan, *Qiangu wenren xiake meng*, p. 98.
25. Xu Sinian, *Xia de zongji*, p. 99.
26. Xiao Zhijun, Dai Yijun, Chen Erxun (ed.), *Zhongguo wuxia xiaoshuo daguan* ('An Overview of Chinese Wuxia Novels') (Kunming: Yunnan People's Press, 1993), p. 121.
27. Chen Pingyuan, *Qiangu wenren xiake meng*, p. 98.
28. Ibid., p. 101.
29. Ibid., p. 107.
30. Chen Mo, *Daoguang jianying mengtaiqi*, pp. 78–79.
31. See Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe' ('Historical Sketch of the Modern Chinese Cinema'), in *Jindai Zhongguo yishu fazhanshi* ('The History of the Development of Contemporary Chinese Arts') (Shanghai: Liangyou Company, 1936), reprinted in *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* ('The Chinese Silent Cinema') (Beijing: China Film Press, 1996), p. 1386. *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* is hereinafter abbreviated to *ZWD*.
32. See Pu Dishu, 'Guochan diaying zuofeng de gaibian ji jinhou de qushi' (The Reform and Future Trends of The National Cinema'), *Yingxi shenghuo* ('Film Life'), No. 33, August 1931.
33. See Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe', *ZWD*, p. 1412.
34. Ibid., p. 1403.
35. See Wenwei Du, 'Xi and Yingxi: The Interaction between Traditional Theatre and Chinese Cinema', *Screening the Past*, www.latrobe.edu.au/www/screeningthepast, issue 11, uploaded 1 November 2000.
36. Quoted in Yu Mo-wan, 'Xianggang dianying shihua' ('A Historical Narrative of Hong Kong Cinema'), *Dianying shuangzhou kan* ('Film Biweekly'), No. 50, 18 December 1980, p. 30.
37. Jay Leyda, *Dianying, Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), p. 52.
38. Chen Zhiqing, 'Duiyu shezhi guzhang yingpian zhi yijian' ('Opinions on the Making of Guzhuang Pictures'), *Shenzhou tekan 'Daoyi zhi jiao' hao* ('Shenzhou Special Issue "The Meeting of Morality and Justice"'), February 1926, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 639.

39. Sun Shiyi, 'Dianying jie de guju fengkuang zheng' ('The Film World's Fervour for Costume Films') *Yinxing* ('Silver Star'), no. 3, 1926, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 644.
40. Ibid., p. 643.
41. See Kristine Harris, '"The Romance of the Western Chamber" and the Classical Subject in 1920s Shanghai', in Yingjin Zhang (ed.), *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922–1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 51–73, esp. p. 57.
42. See Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying wenhua shi*, p. 92.
43. Leyda, *Dianying*, p. 22.
44. See Gu Jianchen, 'Zhongguo dianying fada shi' ('The Development History of Chinese Cinema') in *Qingqing dianying zhoukan* ('The Chin Chin Screen'), No. 32, 1939, p. 17. See also Chen Mo, *Daoguang xiaying mengtaiqi*, p. 80. *Vampire's Prey* is regarded in some quarters as China's first full-length fiction film: see Gongsun Lu, *Zhongguo dianying shihua* ('Conversations on Chinese Film History'), in two volumes (Hong Kong: Nantian Books, no year specified, but probably 1961), Vol. 1, p. 36.
45. Guan Haifeng, 'Wo paishe hongfen gulou de jingguo' ('The Process of My Filming Ten Sisters'), *Zhongguo dianying* ('Chinese Cinema'), No. 5, 1957, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 1492.
46. This plot outline is taken from Guan Haifeng's own description. See Guan, 'Wo paishe hongfen gulou de jingguo', *ZWD*, p. 1492.
47. Gu Jianchen, 'Zhongguo dianying fada shi'.
48. Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi* ('A History of the Silent Chinese Cinema') (Beijing: China Film Press, 1996), p. 222.
49. Bai Jian, 'Tan shenguai yingpian' ('On Shenguai Films'), in *Lianhua huabao* ('Lianhua Pictorial'), 7:1, February 1936, quoted in Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*.
50. Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe', *ZWD*, p. 1412.
51. Ibid., p. 1412.
52. See Zhu ?, 'Lun guzhuang ju: shenguai ju yu lishi ju' ('On Guzhuang Films: Shenguai Films and Historical Films'), *Dazhonghua baihe gongsi tekan 'Meiren ji'* ('Dazhonghua Baihe Film Company Brochure "The Beauty's Stratagem"'), 1927, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 651.
53. See Zhou Jianyun and Wang Xuchang, 'Yingxi gailun' ('An Introduction to Cinema'), *Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan* ('Chinese Film Theory: An Anthology') (Beijing: Culture and Arts Publications House, 1992), p. 26.
54. Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe', *ZWD*, p. 1412.
55. Ying Dou, 'Shenguaiju zhi wojian' ('My View on Shenguai Drama'), *Yinxing* ('Silver Star'), No. 8, 1927, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 662.
56. Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe', *ZWD*, p. 1413.
57. Cheng Xiaoqing, 'Wo zhi shenguai yingpian guan' ('My View on *Shenguai* Movies'), published in the film brochure *Xiyouji pansidong tekan* ('Visit to the Western World') (Shanghai Photoplay Company, 1927).
58. See Zhiwei Xiao, 'Constructing a New National Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition, and Sex in the Nanjing Decade', in Yingjin Zhang (ed.), *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai*, p. 190.
59. The earliest English translation is that of Henry H. Hart, *The West Chamber* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1936). For other texts and more recent translations, see Kristine Harris, '"The Romance of the Western Chamber" and the Classical Subject in 1920s Shanghai', notes, p. 273.
60. For a more detailed discussion of this dream sequence, see Harris, '"The Romance of the Western Chamber"', pp. 68–71.

61. Hou Yao, 'Yandi de xixiang' ('West Chamber Before Our Eyes'), originally published in *Minxin Special Edition* ('Minxin tekan'), No. 7, 1 September 1927, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 327.
62. According to *Shanghai dianying zhi* ('Shanghai Cinema Annals'), Wu Yigong (ed.), (Shanghai: Social Science Academy Press, 1998), p. 192, the film was released in Paris in the summer of 1928 and in London in the summer of 1929. Kristine Harris gives the French title as *La Rose de Pu-chui*; see Harris, '"The Romance of the Western Chamber"', p. 276.
63. Harris, '"The Romance of the Western Chamber"', p. 53.
64. E. Perry Link, Jr, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, p. 20.
65. See Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe', *ZWD*, p. 1414. See also Wang Haizhou, 'Gangtai wuxia pian gailun' ('An Outline of Hong Kong and Taiwan *Wuxia* Pictures'), *Dangdai dianying* ('Contemporary Cinema'), No. 4 , July 1994, 76–83, p. 77.
66. Lu Mengshu, 'Xin Yingxiong Zhuyi' ('New Heroism'), *Yinxing* ('Silver Star'), No. 4, 1926, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 737.
67. See Weihong Bao, 'From Pearl White to White Rose Woo', p. 207. Bao explains that the tenets of New Heroism as a neoromanticist sub-movement grew out of the May Fourth tide towards modernity in Chinese letters and in society at large: see pp. 207–209.
68. See Wang Haizhou, 'Gangtai wuxia pian gailun', p. 77.
69. See Yi An, 'Xin shidai de yingxiong' ('Heroes of the New Era'), *Yinxing* ('Silver Star'), No. 4, 1926, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 669.
70. Wen Xiang 'Da xia Gan Fengchi' ('The Hero Gan Fengchi'), *Zhongguo dianying zazhi* ('Chinese Film Magazine'), No. 13, 1928, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 1173.
71. See Gongsun Lu, *Zhongguo dianying shihua*, p. 48.
72. See Zhang Zhen, 'Teahouse, Shadowplay, Bricolage: 'Labourer's Love' and the Question of Early Chinese Cinema,' in Yingjin Zhang (ed.), *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai*, p. 46.
73. See He Xiujun, 'Zhang Shichuan he Mingxing yingpian gongsi' ('Zhang Shichuan and the Star Motion Picture Company'), in *ZWD*, p. 1528. He Xiujun, Zhang's widow, gave an oral account of her husband's pioneering involvement in Chinese cinema that was first published in *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* ('Selections of Literary and Historical Materials'), No. 67, 1980, reprinted in *ZWD*. For more on Zhang Shichuan, see Harriet Sergeant, *Shanghai* (London: John Murray, 1991), pp. 250–56, which quotes from He Xiujun's original oral account.
74. Robert Kung, *Gong jianong congying huiyi lu* ('Robert Kung's Memoirs of His Screen Life') (Hong Kong: Culture Book House, 1968), pp. 158–159.
75. Kung, *Gong jianong congying huiyi lu*, p. 157.
76. Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe', *ZWD*, p. 1415.
77. Kung, *Gong jianong congying huiyi lu*, pp. 162–163.
78. Qing Ping, 'Cong wuxia dianying shuo dao 'Huo shao Honglian si' he 'Shui hu" ('From *Wuxia* Films to a Discussion of 'The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple' and 'The Water Margin"), *Yingxi shenghuo* ('Film Life'), Vol 1, No. 3, 1931, reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 1177.
79. Kung, *Gong jianong congying huiyi lu*, p. 157.
80. See Zheng Zhenfeng, 'Lun wuxia xiaoshuo' ('On the *wuxia* novel'), originally published in *Haiyan*, July 1932, reprinted in *Zheng Zhenfeng xuanji* ('Zheng Zhenfeng Collected Works'), in two volumes (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1984), pp. 1125–1129, esp. p. 1127.
81. He Xiujun, 'Zhang Shichuan he Mingxing yingpian gongsi', *ZWD*, p. 1529.
82. Paul Pickowicz reminds us that May Fourth intellectuals never regarded cinema 'as

a serious form of art'. The film medium belonged 'to the realm of popular culture and placed a premium on simplicity of message' and was because of this not the favoured medium of the May Fourth literati. 'The illiterate and semiliterate film audience had little in common with sober-minded May Fourth intellectuals'. To the intellectuals, the *wuxia* genre was the vehicle that drove their contempt for the cinema. See Pickowicz, 'The Theme of Spiritual Pollution in Chinese Films of the 1930s', *Modern China*, 17:1, January 1991, 38–75, esp. p. 70.

2. REACTIONS AGAINST THE *WUXIA* GENRE

In the previous chapter, I accounted for some of the factors contributing to the rise of the *wuxia shenguai* genre. Intellectuals initially regarded the warrior tradition in the genre as one of the elements that could provide a positive counterweight to China's image as the 'sick man of Asia'. The genre would function as a tool to encourage heroism along the line of New Heroism which could eventually help to foster a military tradition that had long disappeared in China. According to this line of thought, the scholar tradition that took over had atrophied and let the nation down badly, contributing to its decline. However, the genre did not live up to the humanist ideals of New Heroism and, according to its detractors, descended instead into the lower depths of pornography, feudalism and superstition. The genre was now seen as backward, running contrary to the principles of the May Fourth Movement that was driving China since 1919 to refashion itself as a modern nation conforming to the precepts of science and democracy.

Backlash and Proscription

The popularity of the *wuxia shenguai* film had aroused the curiosity of intellectuals. In a famous essay, published in 1933, the left-wing writer Mao Dun provided a fascinating inside look at audience reception to the *Red Lotus Temple* series:

> You only have to enter the cinema showing this particular series to see its magic power at work on the petty urbanites [*xiao shimin*]. The audi-

> ence can't help but shout 'bravo!' and applaud. From start to finish, a fanatical audience surrounds you and whenever the knights-errant engage in a combat scene and start projecting their flying swords, the audience screams hysterically as if they are themselves right in the midst of battle. When the character Hong Gu (literally Red Maiden) enters the scene from flying through the sky, they break out in applause, not because Butterfly Wu plays her, but because she is a swordswoman, the central protagonist of *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*. When they criticise the film, they don't say this or that actor has given a good or a bad performance. Instead they criticise the merits or demerits of the Kunlun school or the Emei school. To them, the film is real, not a play of shadows on the screen. If you must cite an example of a Chinese film that can affect an audience's emotions, then cite *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*.[1]

Mao Dun's criticism prefigured some of the latter concerns over the genre's perceived 'realism' which at this stage was merely a reflection on the cinema's ability to exert its magical power over the minds and senses of the *xiao shimin* or petty urbanites. Hanchao Lu defines *xiao shimin* as a 'blanket term popularly known and literally used to refer, often with condescension, to city or town people who were of the middle or lower-middle social ranks.'[2] Many in fact were semi-literate migrants from the provinces who had come to the city to look for a better life.

Mao Dun believed that the audience for *wuxia shenguai* films was not 'appreciating art but indulging in hero-worship, intoxicating themselves with the dream of a super man's lifestyle and deeds.'[3] The *Red Lotus Temple* series drew its material from feudal thought and its chief function was to propagate feudalism. This view of *wuxia shenguai* pictures is one that is broadly shared by left and right, though left-wing critics looked at the genre as an aberration created by right-wing artists who had gained ground over left-wing artists in the Mingxing Studio since 1928.[4] According to this view, the left would not gain the upper hand in the Shanghai film industry until the early 1930s via the Lianhua Company. However, both the left and the right were united in viewing the genre as morally corrupt. Not only did the genre deal in superstition, it also purveyed 'yellow' (*huangse*) culture, meaning pornography.

A poster of an episode of *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* shows a monk surrounded by a bevy of scantily clad women, and in an extant example of the genre, *The Red Heroine* (1929), a village girl (played by Fan Xuepeng) is captured by soldiers of a marauding army known as the Western army, and brought into the harem of its commanding general, waited upon by cavorting half-naked women. The young girl is stripped near-naked in the general's boudoir and is about to be raped by the depraved general when a mysterious

old man from Mount Emei appears to save the girl, trouncing the general with his kung fu. This *shifu* (master) takes the girl away and trains her in the martial arts to become a champion of the underdog. Several years later, she returns, possessing powers of flight and the ability to appear and disappear at will, to save another village girl fallen into the clutches of the general. Fan Xuepeng herself recalled that as the *wuxia* pictures waned in popularity, producers put in more and more sex in an effort to sustain their appeal.[5]

The 'sexploitation' angle in *The Red Heroine* and *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* can be seen as a legacy of 'low culture', that genre of classical fiction where the tendency of both the storytellers and their audience alike was to indulge in 'an unsqueamish delight in sex, filth, and disease', as C. T. Hsia has described it.[6] The cinema inherited this tradition from the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school (*yuanyang hudie pai*), hereafter referred to as Butterfly fiction, a genre of classical-style love stories. Perry Link informs us that Chinese critics and writers of the May Fourth Movement, among them Mao Dun, tended to view Butterfly fiction as a repository of all kinds of popular old-style fiction, including *wuxia* novels, that they considered degrading low culture.[7] In the cinema, the Butterfly genre became popular at about the same time as the *wuxia* genre. Both genres were appropriated by the film industry because of their massive popularity in the print media. The petty urbanites constituted the chief audience for Butterfly and *wuxia* movies, taking in the sentimentality of the former and the fantasy of the latter.

Left-wing critics such as Mao Dun viewed the espousal of heroism in *wuxia* mythology as an unhealthy trend because it transformed revolutionary class struggle into 'private feuds'.[8] Any vestige of revolutionary content in the genre – expressed in an earlier example such as Sun Yu's *Fengliu jianke* (*The Romantic Swordsman*), released in 1929, which won praise from critics at the time for its 'real revolutionary spirit' and its 'spirit of resistance'[9] – would have been wiped out by the *shenguai* tendency to depict the struggle in terms of magic and fantasy.[10] Conservative traditionalists, on the other hand, feared that the genre might instigate anarchy and violence. Indeed, there were critics at this time (1931) who pointed out that the *wuxia* film genre contained too much *wu* (violence) and too little *xia* (chivalry).[11]

Generally, the outcry against the genre centred on the genre's supposed propensity to poison the minds of the young with superstition and cult worship of imaginary heroes possessing supernatural powers. Youth would thus be led away from the right and proper path of education and filial loyalty to parents and authorities. To the GMD, films could be used as a tool to teach conservative values and moral precepts based on Confucianist ethics. Administrations throughout the country usually delegated the task of reviewing films for censorship to their education bureaus. Under the GMD government, the education bureaus were to come under strict control of the party.[12] A view of the priori-

ties of the education bureaus in reviewing films based on educational properties may be glimpsed from the following quotation:

> Film possesses all the methods of conveying human thoughts and emotions, such as language, words, music, image, action, etc. Its power to move is greater than all the arts of literature, music, sculpture, and dance. The masses' acceptance of the consciousness imparted by the screen invariably influences the whole of society and life. Such great power encompasses a broad significance for education, particularly in the context of social education, and even more, it possesses a wide-ranging usefulness. On the other hand, because screenplays may derive their subject matter from incorrect sources and because of low standards of technique, the cinema may lead one to obscenity and thievery through genres such as *wuxia shenguai* pictures (which mislead the audience with supernaturalism and fantasy). This will greatly harm the national psychology and upset social order.[13]

Through censorship, the GMD Government, which had taken control over China in 1927 following the Northern Expedition, sought to impose its moral vision based on the modernising principles of the New Culture Movement, the May Fourth Movement, and a general regard for science which Daniel Kwok has defined as 'scientism', an intellectual outlook which 'assumes that all aspects of the universe are knowable through the methods of science'.[14] Scientism in China had gathered momentum since the end of the nineteenth century, and had become pervasive with the establishment of the Republic and the onslaught of the May Fourth Movement. Running parallel with scientism was the anti-religion movement. Prasenjit Duara has given a trenchant account of the government's attack on religion and superstition in the 1920s as part of the general ascendancy of scientism among the Chinese intelligentsia.[15]

At this time, the government moved to ban foreign films which preached Christianity for their adverse effects on Chinese society (though other genres, such as American detective movies that depicted kidnappings, and love stories that depicted 'carnal desire', were also banned[16]). As in the case of *wuxia shenguai* films, they were attacked for spreading superstition and unscientific thinking. The GMD also had its own reservations against the *wuxia* genre, being wary that the films could induce anarchy and rebellion among the young. 'For a Nationalist Government concerned with stability and control, the problem was not that these films were insufficiently revolutionary, but rather that they were *too rebellious*', wrote Kristine Harris.[17]

The GMD's move to proscribe the genre was not without historical precedence. Jean Chesneaux informs us that under the Qing dynasty, there were government regulations against the novel *Shuihu zhuan/The Water Margin*.

Translations of the novel into the Manchu language were opposed and 'versions in Chinese were forbidden in 1774 and 1808.' The book was banned altogether in 1851.[18] As a military romance, the work glorifies outlawry and the notion that 'when the government is dominated by corrupt ministers, it is not dishonourable to occupy a mountain and turn bandit.'[19] Thus, there were also political ramifications arising out of the *wuxia shenguai* genre for it to become one of the GMD's targets for censorship, along with the films of the ideological left.

The government promulgated a Film Censorship Law in November 1930. In January 1931, the Executive Yuan (the Chinese parliament) formally established the Film Censorship Committee (Dianying Jiancha Weiyuanhui), putting the control of censorship in the hands of the central government for the first time. The committee was charged with the duty to review not only locally produced films but also all foreign films distributed in the nation.[20] However, from 1931–1934, because of the teething difficulties of the Film Censorship Committee, small film companies in Shanghai could continue to produce *wuxia shenguai* pictures for export to Hong Kong and the *nanyang* (Southeast Asian) markets where the genre was not banned and where it remained popular. That they could do so attests to a certain vagueness, or laxity, in the censorship law, but this is possibly an effect of the applications of cultural codes in the system according to Chinese norms rather than a failure of strict interpretation or enforcement of the law.[21]

Indeed, most historical accounts do not point to any government order or official promulgation of a ban of the genre. In fact, during this period, the government had merely proscribed the genre with the aim of limiting its production or release (the Chinese terminology here is *jinzhi*), not to impose an outright ban (the terminology in this case being *qudi*). The government had by this time adopted a 'go easy' policy, and the financially troubled small companies felt sufficiently encouraged to lodge appeals to the authorities to pass *wuxia shenguai* pictures they had already produced, and promising not to produce any more.[22] Episodes of *wuxia* film serials continued to be produced until 1935, as Chen Mo informs us. Chen cites the case of *Nü biaoshi/The Lady Protector*, begun in 1931, and speculates that the reason why it could continue production was because it cut down the *shenguai* elements.[23]

Despite the vagueness of the law, there is no doubt that the government's policy was to actively discourage the production of *wuxia shenguai* pictures and that it targeted the genre when it came to banning films. Of all the films banned in 1933, according to a report in the China Film Yearbook, *wuxia* films topped the list.[24] While small companies could still get by with producing *wuxia shenguai* pictures until at least the mid-1930s, a major company like Mingxing found it more difficult to get around the censorship committee. Its scripts were required to be submitted to the committee for review. In his

book of memoirs, published in 1983, the veteran director Cheng Bugao describes how Mingxing was ordered by the censorship board to cancel three projects based on stories from *The Water Margin* that had commenced shooting in 1932.[25]

In March 1934, the government amended the Film Censorship Law placing the Film Censorship Committee under a new structure that would ostensibly include members from the film industry itself. A new clause stipulated that the new committee, to be named the Central Film Censorship Committee (Zhongyang Dianying Jiancha Weiyuanhui), would be appointed by the Executive Yuan acting on suggestions of an advisory committee made up of film industry insiders who could recommend names for the head and sitting members of the CFCC.[26] The first designated task of the CFCC was to finally enforce an 'outright ban on all early *wuxia shenguai* pictures'.[27] This terminology suggests a harder line than that of the previous censorship regimes, and showed the government's resolve to effectively clamp down on companies that were still releasing *wuxia shenguai* pictures produced in previous years.

The genre was still popular in the market despite the attempt to ban them since 1931. The government's new hard line was to show the film industry that it now meant business (although there were other more sinister political motives that I will touch upon below). To smoothen the hard line somewhat, the CFCC used aesthetics as an argument claiming that it was doing the film industry a favour by banning low grade, technically inferior films so as to 'lift the technical standards of cinema'. The early *wuxia shenguai* pictures were deemed to be of such extraordinarily low technical standards that they would be banned on this basis as well as for their advocacy of superstition and heresy.[28]

The second task of the CFCC was to observe and guide film companies as they made the transition to a new genre. The 'reformed new style of work' put out by the studios tended towards 'the description of social-realist lifestyles'. The CFCC had to ensure that such films did not 'become too extreme.'[29] It was further empowered to register and censor scripts, advertisements and trailers, publicity materials and even intertitles.[30]

The censorship law had now become a sophisticated instrument in the GMD's adoption of a hard line in eliminating its political opposition in the film world. This hard line came to be known as the 'encirclement and suppression' (*weijiao*) policy. The CFCC was the stick that the GMD used to beat film studios into submission, particularly as Communist writers and directors gained entry into Shanghai's big and small production houses.

In July 1934, the committee's personnel entered the Jinan production house to inventory and confiscate film prints and other items in the studio's possessions on the pretext of enforcing the ban on *wuxia shenguai* pictures.[31] When the company resumed operations, it found that it had to accept 'writers' who were in fact special agents dispatched by the government to vet

scripts. From November 1934 to March 1935, the committee prohibited the production of eighty-three screenplays.[32] The GMD would also use money as a weapon against the film industry's entrepreneurs, often cutting off loans to companies at crucial moments with the plan to buy them over, as it attempted to do with the Mingxing studio.[33] The 'encirclement and suppression policy' therefore also targeted those capitalist entrepreneurs in the film industry who were not among Chiang Kai-shek's cronies. Seeking to control Shanghai's business sector with the help of his brothers-in-law T. V. Soong and H. H. Kung (the heads of two of China's richest families), 'Chiang Kai-shek persecuted the city's businessmen as vigorously as he did its writers and journalists.'[34]

By 1935 the film industry was all but destroyed by censorship. The CFCC organised raids in the Chinese quarters of Shanghai, seizing and destroying films and negatives, sets, props and implements from small companies that were still in the business of making *wuxia shenguai* pictures in defiance of the ban.[35] At least, this was the pretext used to clamp down on small companies, which tended to be a nesting ground for left-wing film workers. The GMD had by this time cultivated a line of a so-called 'soft' cinema (*ruanxing dianying*). Its main advocates were the writers Liu Na'ou, Mu Shiying and Huang Jiamo. In general, the thrust of the soft line was that more attention should be paid to form and aesthetics rather than to content which could be deformed by politics.[36] Ironically, *wuxia shenguai* pictures were perfect examples of 'soft cinema' and some officials began to question the wisdom of the ban suggesting that it should be lifted as a counterforce against the left-wing 'hard' cinema. The lifting of the ban could also help the industry revive its economic fortunes.

Though the ban applied to the Mainland, demand was still strong in the overseas markets. In Hong Kong, revivals of all eighteen episodes of *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* continued to pull in crowds at premium prices as late as 1935 but this testified to the low output of new product and the fact that Hong Kong exhibitors had to rely on revivals and the occasional new *wuxia shenguai* picture put out by companies in Guangzhou (the other centre after Hong Kong that produced Cantonese-dialect pictures).[37] Small companies in Shanghai and Guangzhou could survive only by catering to the Hong Kong and *nanyang* markets. An extract from a report printed in the Shanghai Film Yearbook of 1935 reads: 'In the darkness of their near-hopeless circumstances, these markets offered a ray of light. Hence, they (the small companies) went about secretly producing a great many works in defiance of the ban by the Central Film Censorship Committee.'[38] Though the government eventually relaxed enforcement of the ban in the period following the clampdown on the small companies, Zhiwei Xiao noted that the government never 'reneged on its policy' to ban the genre.[39]

Wuxia Redux

While the ban on the genre remained in force, the *wuxia shenguai* picture was able to regenerate itself during the *gudao* ('Orphan Island'[40]) period from 1938–1941. The term *gudao* refers to the unoccupied zones in Shanghai from 1937 to 1941 following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. These zones were the International Settlement and the French Concession, which remained officially neutral in the Sino–Japanese conflict and were therefore left untouched by the Japanese. These two zones would remain unoccupied until the outbreak of the Pacific War as a result of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

The war caused some filmmakers based in Shanghai to disperse while most stayed behind in the *gudao*. This brought about a situation that Chinese film historian Li Daoxin has identified as a quadripartite division of film production that came about over the whole wartime period (1937–1945).[41] First, a large group of filmmakers congregated in the rear areas, following the government as it retreated from Nanjing to Wuhan and Chongqing. Those filmmakers who remained behind in Shanghai sheltered in the *gudao*; others fled to Hong Kong, a British colony which was as yet not caught up in the war. The *gudao* and Hong Kong are lumped together as a second centre of wartime film production, both localities sharing the feature of being foreign-administered zones. A third centre was the Communist base in Yan'an while the Japanese occupied areas of Manchuria and northern China, together with the cinema of fully-occupied Shanghai from 1941 to 1945, constituted the fourth and final axis of production.

In terms of the *wuxia* genre, the most significant film in this 'period of extremity' (*feichang shiqi*), as the Chinese described wartime conditions, was *Mulan congjun* (alternatively known in English as *Hua Mulan*, *Mulan Joins the Army*, *Maiden in Armour*), a production of the *gudao* cinema released in 1939. Though most historians regard the film as a historical period movie (*guzhuang pian*) rather than a *wuxia* piece, it is more accurately a historical military romance with definite associations to the *wuxia* genre, particularly through the central figure of Hua Mulan, who evokes the female knight-errant made familiar through literature such as *Ernü yingxiong zhuan* (*A Tale of Heroic Lovers*). Hua Mulan is a well-known historical figure which itself was alluded to in *A Tale of Heroic Lovers* in connection with the heroine Thirteenth Sister (in chapter 19 of the novel, the baby Thirteenth Sister is predicted to grow up to become like Hua Mulan, taking up arms on behalf of the father). Hua Mulan's act of dressing up as a man to join the army in a time of national emergency, on behalf of her old and infirm father, presents her as a historical prototype of cross-dressing female warriors in the *wuxia* genre.

However, *Mulan Joins the Army* alludes to the historical Hua Mulan rather than to a fictional knight-errant figure. In a sense, the film shows how the *wuxia*

genre was now marginalised in Chinese cinema, as a consequence of the ban imposed on *wuxia* although the genre would make a comeback within the special political environment of the *gudao*. It could no longer justify itself as a *wuxia* film but rather through the guise of a historical costume picture serving as an allegory about foreign invasion and the need to resist the enemy. But even as a historical costume film, *Mulan* was not free of controversy. When it was premiered in Chongqing, the wartime capital, the audience saw the film as a mockery of patriotic militarism. A riot took place. In this instance, the film can be seen as a classic representation of the *gudao* cinema's 'political ambivalence', a phrase used by film historian Poshek Fu to refer to the ideological disquiet produced as an effect of the Chinese cinema located in the *gudao* and subsequently the cinema operating under the aegis of the Japanese in the full occupation of Shanghai.[42]

I will examine below the thesis of political ambivalence as it was actualised in the *gudao* cinema and the so-called 'Mulan Incident', referring to the riot and the subsequent burning of the film by the audience on its premiere showing in Chongqing. The ambivalence in Fu's thesis is an outcome of historic circumstances though it has been the tendency to view the wartime industry as being politically ambivalent from the perspective of the left. Ambivalence, as defined by Julia Kristeva, implies the insertion of history (society) into a text, and this occurs as part of an intertexual relationship with the notion of dialogue, a form of writing where one reads the Other. The insertion of a moral message is actualised as textual ambivalence.[43]

The ambivalence had to work on a political level. The *gudao* films had to appear not too pro-Japanese to the GMD and patriotic Chinese intellectuals, and not too anti-Japanese to the Japanese occupiers. Jubin Hu makes the point that *Mulan Joins the Army*, considered by many to be 'the most clearly anti-Japanese' of the historical costume films made in that period, was actually shown in Japanese-occupied areas and in Japan itself in 1942 because the Japanese considered it 'merely . . . a historical story'.[44]

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese fully occupied Shanghai and restructured the film industry by amalgamating Chinese film companies through organisations such as the China United Film Company (or Zhonglian), and its successor the China United Film Company Limited (or Huaying). Since the period of the full occupation from 1941 to 1945 has yielded relatively little *wuxia* film production, I have decided to leave it out of this discussion. Of the handful of films that might be labelled *wuxia* produced in this period, I have seen only one, *Hunjiang long Li Jun* (*Li Jun, A Hero of the River*), released in 1945, starring Wang Yuanlong and directed by him. The minor quality of the film suggests that the *wuxia* films of this period were pretty negligible, but they await further investigation.[45]

Poshek Fu makes the point that the Shanghai cinema of the occupation (which is equally valid of the *gudao* cinema) was filled with 'creative vitality

that had nothing to do with pro-Japanese propaganda'.[46] Of this cinema, one could say that some filmmakers were not above the use of allegory to make patriotic points about the war. On the other hand, the *gudao* cinema could be looked upon as a genuine attempt to revive the Chinese film industry under wartime conditions after it was shut down by the Japanese attack on Shanghai in 1937. The economy in the *gudao* experienced an abnormal period of prosperity, driven by the influx of refugees.[47] This abnormal prosperity provided the circumstances for the film industry to revive, catering to the swelling refugee population inside the *gudao*. The revival was an industrial, commercial one in that it ignited an outburst of production as well as a retrospective recycling of old, proven genres that could pull in the crowds.

In 1938, Zhang Shichuan re-released six episodes of the original *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* series.[48] Because the films were silent, he added a music soundtrack as the novelty to pull in the crowds. Zhang was trying to cash in on the fact that the series had not been seen for several years due to the ban on the genre.[49] He himself was hard up because the Japanese had seized his studio, causing film production to come to a halt. Eager to get back into show business, he justified the re-release of the *Burning* series as an action to 'relieve the economic hardships of his Mingxing colleagues'.[50] The re-release of the 'Burning' films started the *wuxia* ball rolling once again, initiating a new wave of production of the banned genre, this time in the *gudao*.

Other producers remade their old pictures from the genre's heyday, indicating perhaps that the public was more accepting of new remakes rather than revivals of old films. Some of these remakes included *Wangshi sixia* (*The Four Knights-Errant of the Wang Family*, the *gudao* version released in 1938); the first sound version of *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* produced by the Huayi Film Company, directed by Wu Wenchao, released in 1940; *Hong Hudie* (*Red Butterfly*), directed by Wu Wenchao, released in 1941,[51] and many more productions too numerous to list down here.[52] That the genre could undergo a period of resurgence was of course due to the changed circumstances of political control in Shanghai. As Jubin Hu reminds us, the GMD had lost control of the Shanghai film industry and could not therefore censor films produced there as before.[53]

The one genre that symbolised the rise of the *gudao* cinema was, however, the historical period movie (*guzhuang pian*), which was a popular genre in the 1920s before the emergence of the *wuxia* craze. *Guzhuang pian* was revived in the *gudao* with the release of *Diao Chan* (*Sable Cicada*) in 1938, one year before *Mulan Joins the Army*. *Sable Cicada* commenced production in Shanghai by Zhang Shankun's Xinhua Company before the war started, and it had to be completed in Hong Kong when Shanghai became a war zone.[54] The film was a commercial hit, but it was the even bigger success of *Mulan Joins the Army* (1939) that sparked off the resurgence of the historical period movie in the *gudao* cinema.

Critics at the time viewed the *guzhuang* genre more favourably than the *wuxia* film, stressing its intrinsic value as history (as opposed to escapist fantasy), and its ability to turn cinema into 'a new strategic weapon' to lift the consciousness of the public against the enemy 'just as they were seeking to attack the Chinese film industry'.[55] The fact that both *Sable Cicada* and *Mulan Joins the Army* concentrated on female historical figures as symbols of resistance was significant to the genre's revival. As Chang-tai Hung has asserted, 'the cultivation and exaltation of female resistance symbols' was probably the most effective and appealing way for Chinese dramatists to 'galvanize the support of the people to fight against the invading Japanese'.[56] However, female symbols were also ambivalent symbols, like the female knight-errant in traditional *wuxia* literature, who was, on the one hand, 'gentle, feminine, and blessed with unmatched beauty', and on the other hand, 'brave and upright . . . superbly skilled with the sword and defies death on the battlefield'.[57] *Mulan* portrayed a female warrior who embodied exactly this kind of ambivalence, which was central to its success as a wartime allegory that even proved acceptable to the Japanese.

Not all historical films concentrated on female symbols, and it is worthwhile to mention some important *guzhuang pian* in the *gudao* period, including Fei Mu's biopic *Kong fuzi* (*Confucius*, 1940), and Zhu Shilin's four-part *Wen Suchen* (1939–40), the name of the character based on the romantic swordsman-*xia* figure from the novel *Yesou puyan* (*The Humble Words of an Old Rustic*). The Wan Brothers' animated cartoon feature *Tieshan gongzhu* (*Princess Iron Fan*, 1941) should also be mentioned here as a part of the genre resurgence of *wuxia* and *guzhuang* pictures, though in this case, it provided a spur to the production of China's first animated feature. The *gudao* cinema entered a 'golden age' of production in the Chinese film industry, spearheaded by Zhang Shankun's Xinhua Company.[58]

Poshek Fu notes that in the four years (1938–1941) of its existence, the *gudao* film industry produced a total of 230 features, the second most productive period in the history of Chinese cinema (the first was 1928–1931: the period of the rise of the *shenguai wuxia* pictures).[59] By any standards, this was a remarkable feat of survival under adverse conditions, proving the agility of the Chinese filmmakers in maintaining an industry in wartime, showing their commercial acumen and instincts for survival, though being heavily criticised for it.

Though the majority of *gudao* films generally stayed clear of political propaganda and conformed to the goal of mass entertainment, they finally caused a feeling of resentment among those who went into exile in Chongqing and elsewhere, including many left-wingers in the film industry. While a country at war demanded a clear political stand of its citizens, some of the country's best and brightest talents operating in the *gudao* came up with moral ambiguity. A *gudao* film could arouse conflicting emotions, as was demonstrated by the incident that arose from the showing of *Mulan Joins the Army* in Chongqing.

The Mulan Incident

Poshek Fu points out that *Mulan Joins the Army* was one of the few Chinese-made films in the *gudao* 'to score big box-office successes due to their patriotic appeals'.[60] A production of the Xinhua Film Company under a subsidiary named Huacheng, it was shot in the *gudao* and released in 1939 in Shanghai. Ouyang Yuqian wrote the script in Hong Kong, intending it as an allegory to help raise the Chinese audience's consciousness of resistance against the enemy.[61] The film's success in Shanghai – the picture ran for sixty-four days setting a box-office record[62] – implied that audiences favourably received such an allegory.

However, when shown in the wartime capital Chongqing, it was attacked by elements (later alleged to be left-wing agitators) that claimed the film harmed the war effort because it contained scenes that 'inflamed the emotions of the audience'.[63] In other words, the film was considered as downright traitorous if not ambivalent in its message of resistance. The dominant discourse in the wartime capital was that 'there was *either* resistance to *or* complicity with the enemy', as Poshek Fu has noted (his emphases).[64] A further mark against the film was the fact that it was shown in Japanese-occupied territories through an agreement that Zhang Shankun had secured with the Japanese-controlled China Motion Picture Company ('Zhongdian' in Chinese).[65] If the movie contained a message of forthright resistance against the Japanese, this would not have been possible.

The film chronicles the episodes of Hua Mulan's life from dainty village girl to celebrated soldier. We first see her as a tomboyish girl teased by a group of young men while out riding on a hunt. This scene is followed by a song interlude (*chaqu*) where Mulan (played by Nancy Chan) sings along with a chorus of children: 'Quickly practise your kung fu, bandits and robbers may come but we won't be afraid, we'll send them packing back to their old haunts!' On returning home, Mulan is upbraided by her old father, a retired soldier, for not behaving like a girl. When her father receives an order to rejoin the army to fight the invading Tartars, Mulan offers to go in his place, disguised as a man. On her way to the front, her fellow conscripts tease her for her feminine appearance. Mulan soon distinguishes herself as a soldier, rising up in the ranks, finally becoming supreme commander of the army after thwarting a plot by the Tartars to infiltrate the Chinese base with the help of a traitor. The film ends in the reunion of Hua Mulan with her parents, and the shedding of her male disguise to appear for the first time as a woman before her men.[66]

The incident that the film provoked when it opened in Chongqing on 27 January 1940, is described below in an eyewitness account.

> The incident occurred around 2 p.m. Not long after the film began, we were into the scene of actors Han Lan'gen, Yin Xiucen and others going

> out to battle, and, as they said farewell to their loved ones, putting on buffoon-like faces of sorrow and emotions of faint-heartedness. The audience was incensed. Hundreds and thousands of voices were heard to roar in the darkness, a mixture of indignance and curses. The voices intensified, like the thunder following a torrential rain or the cannon pounding the front lines of the enemy. Suddenly, the film was cut off. You couldn't see yourself in the dark. A shrill voice shouted out for the lights to be switched on. The lights were switched on. A big and tall man stood up like a bronze statue amid the audience. 'Compatriots!' he shouted, brandishing his arms. The noise quieted down as the audience looked up to listen. 'Do you know who directed this film?' 'No!' came the reply after a moment's silence. It was strange, now that the question was asked. Normally, as a film opens, it would list out the name of the company, the names of the director, writer and actors. But this print of *Mulan Joins the Army* had no credits of the company's name or the director's name. 'Why are these credits missing? Could it be that they are not fit to be seen? Is it because they are the scums of the film world? They have become traitors! Fellow compatriots! In our wartime capital, our headquarters of resistance . . . right here, to our surprise, there are films to be seen that are made by traitors. This is our greatest shame. Wipe out this shame! Wipe out this shame!'[67]

In the melee that followed, disgruntled members of the audience rushed up to the projection room, seized the offending reel, and rushed out to the streets where they burned the film. The eyewitness account above refers to the scene of soldiers taking their leave of their families as they set out to the front as the direct cause of the incident. The scene depicts the soldiers as soft-hearted, mirthful bumpkins breaking down in sorrow as they leave their families. The sensitivities and emotions aroused in the audience might have been even more aggravated by the sight of the comic actor Han Lan'gen who is so disoriented by the sorrowful leave-taking of his wife that he mounts a donkey with his back to the front. On hindsight, this is a crucial and symbolic image, packing a great psychological impact, and it is possibly the single catalytic factor of anger in the audience since it hardly conveys an image of a brave warrior going to war, but more than that, it de-masculinises the male soldier.

Traditionally, the donkey is associated with wise old Daoists who sometimes rode backwards. In *wuxia* literature, beginning from the Tang *chuanqi* tales, the female knight-errant figure, as represented by the prototype of Nie Yinniang, is portrayed riding a donkey (either a black or a white one) which carries her into a scene of conflict and transports her away after a dramatic resolution with lightning speed.[68] The heroic image of the female knight-errant is thus associated with the donkey, though in the film, Hua Mulan rides a horse rather than a donkey. Such an image would be a familiar one to an audience brought up on

wuxia stories. In showing Han Lan'gen riding a donkey back to front, the filmmakers might have sought to provoke laughter, but subconsciously, the image inverses the gender of the heroic figure such that it impugns not only the required trait of heroism called for in wartime but the 'masculinity' of the soldier (and by implication the collective 'masculinity' of the audience).

During the protest, the director Bu Wancang (also known as Richard Poh) was named and denounced as a traitor. The riot was partly attributed to the allegation that Bu had joined the 'local party' executive committee of the Wang Jingwei 'puppet municipality administration' in Shanghai. Bu was also denounced for making provocative remarks to a Shanghai publication in 1938, expressing his misgivings about the Chinese cinema in wartime: 'The Chinese film industry may take some ten years to recover from the destruction. If we go on like this, our only course is to go to Hong Kong'.[69]

But if there was one person who personified the political ambivalence of the wartime film industry, it was Zhang Shankun, an enigmatic figure whose role as the leader of the *gudao* film industry and his chameleon-like stance during the period of the full occupation ultimately put him in the GMD's black book (though, in her memoirs published in 2001, Zhang's widow Tong Yuejuan claimed that he was actually 'an underground fighter' providing money for the GMD's underground network in Shanghai, taken from the proceeds of the theatres he owned[70]). His friendship and business dealings with the Japanese film executive, Nagamasa Kawakita (the man who established Zhongdian in 1939), also caused a lot of consternation. After the incident, Zhang had to defend himself over claims that his sources of funding as well as his sources of film negatives had come from the Japanese.[71] Zhang managed to convince the Chongqing government of his loyalty with statements signed by the local GMD committee in Shanghai that attested to the film's patriotic content and the producer's commitment to the war effort. However, he was arrested by the GMD as the war was coming to an end in 1945, and accused of collaboration with the enemy.[72] Ironically, as Poshek Fu points out, just before this, he was also arrested by the Japanese Kempeitai, accused of collaborating with Chongqing.[73]

Though it is mostly forgotten today, the Chongqing incident was nevertheless unprecedented, marking the first time in Chinese film history where a local film had caused a riot. Even more unusual, it represented a case of a film that was declared banned after it had been cleared by the censors and shown to the public. After the incident, the film had to be re-submitted to the CFCC for another review and was re-released a few months later.[74] The incident further demonstrated the ideological fragmentation that would tear apart the Chinese cinema and the whole nation. Bu's remarks that the industry in Shanghai would never recover and that the Chinese film industry would eventually be relocated to Hong Kong, proved to be prophetic. He himself ended up in Hong Kong after the war, as did Zhang Shangkun.

Indeed, following the end of the Second World War, virtually the whole Shanghai film industry was transplanted into Hong Kong. The wartime truce between the GMD and the Communist Party fell apart and the two sides renewed their conflict which played out as a civil war from 1946 to 1949. During the conflict, economic conditions worsened and there was rampant inflation. Shanghai's film producers poured capital into Hong Kong to escape the economic mess in the Mainland, while the political uncertainty there further helped to increase the film talent pool in Hong Kong with the migrations of filmmakers. It was at this time that the foundations of Hong Kong's fledgling Mandarin cinema were even more firmly established in the territory.

Those filmmakers who revived the *wuxia* genre in the *gudao* from 1938 to 1941 were now in Hong Kong, making the same kind of *wuxia* pictures that they had churned out in the *gudao*. The first Mandarin film company to be set up in Hong Kong after the war was the Da Zhonghua (Great China) Film Company, in 1946. It followed the *gudao* paradigm of a movie company whose interests were to entertain the public. But the company was much more diverse and acted as a kind of microcosm of the Mandarin cinema that had existed in the *gudao* and which would serve as a model for Hong Kong.

The Da Zhonghua Company employed *gudao* directors, among them Wang Yuanlong, a stalwart of the *wuxia* genre in Shanghai, both in the old days and during the *gudao* period (as well as the period of full occupation). Wang directed *Ernü yingxiong* (*Young Heroes*, 1949), *Tuolong* (*The Hunchbacked Dragon*, 1949), *Daxia fuchou ji* (*Revenge of the Great Swordsman*, 1949).[75] As the Mandarin cinema became established in Hong Kong in the early 1950s, many *gudao* film personalities were in the forefront of efforts to make Mandarin films a viable industry and a commercial business in their new base, while maintaining their credibility as artists, producing not a few classics. These personalities included the producer Zhang Shankun, who founded several Mandarin studios in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

The ban on the *wuxia shenguai* genre led to its transplantation in the Hong Kong cinema where it regenerated itself all over again as a popular form of entertainment. The historic ban on the genre has perpetuated what might well be a historical fallacy in that the *wuxia* cinema was regarded at the time and thereafter as an inferior cinema. However, critics continued to decry the fantasy of the genre, particularly the element of *shenguai*, which was still seen as an aesthetic liability pulling down standards at the expense of worthier aspects of *wuxia*, such as the notions of chivalry, loyalty, filial behaviour.[76] Generally, the martial arts cinema continued to be regarded as a populist but

inferior cinema, a lowbrow entertainment that catered to the tastes of the lowest common denominator.

The ban on the genre took a toll in film preservation as it resulted in the destruction of prints and negatives by censors and even the producers themselves. The 1932 Japanese bombing of Zhabei, Shanghai's Chinese district and the base for many of the smaller film companies, and the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in 1937 resulted in further loss. During the occupation, the Mingxing studios were turned into an army barracks by the Japanese and in November 1939 'they set fire to the area and burnt the Mingxing studio to the ground'.[77] The ravages of war, time and critical oblivion have all played a part in wiping out this heritage and in perpetuating the view that this genre cinema was inferior and sub-standard. However, apparently enough has survived to give a glimpse of its style and development that later influenced the continuance of the genre in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

As Hong Kong developed its postwar film industry, the Shanghai connection was a strong tie in the Mandarin film world and in the Cantonese cinema. The influx of the first generation of Shanghai's filmmaking community helped to foster the *wuxia* genre in the Cantonese cinema, which otherwise lacked the talent and the experience to create its own *wuxia* movies, as film historian Yu Mo-wan has claimed.[78] In other words, without the Shanghai filmmakers, the genre might not have flourished in Hong Kong.

Notes

1. Mao Dun, 'Fengjian de xiao shimin wenyi' ('Literature and Arts of the Feudalistic Petty Urban Bourgeoisie'), *Dongfang zazhi* ('Eastern Miscellany'), Vol 30, No. 3, 1 January 1933; reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 1039.
2. See Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. 61.
3. Ibid.
4. See Xu Daoming, Sha Sipeng, *Zhongguo dianying jianshi* ('A Brief History of Chinese Cinema') (Beijing: China Youth Press, 1990), p. 107.
5. Fan Xuepeng, 'Wo de yinmu shenghuo de huiyi' ('Reminiscences of My Life on the Silver Screen'), *Zhongguo dianying* (*Chinese Cinema*), No. 2, 1956; reprinted in *ZWD*, p. 1479.
6. C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel*, p. 21.
7. See E. Perry Link, Jr, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, p. 7.
8. Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe', *ZWD*, p. 1413.
9. See Chen Mo, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi*, p. 88.
10. Zheng Junli, 'Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilüe'.
11. See Li Ying, 'Wuxia pian de jiegou wenti' ('The Structural Problems of Wuxia Film'), *Yingxi shenghuo* ('Film Life'), No. 28, July 1931.
12. For more on the GMD's attempts to control education, particularly in the Shanghai special municipality, see Christian Henriot, *Shanghai 1927–1937: Municipal Power, Locality and Modernization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 192–193.

13. See Peng Baichuan, 'Jiaoyubu dianjian xingzheng gaikuang,' ('Survey of Education Ministry's Administration of Film Censorship'), *Zhongguo dianying nianjian* ('Chinese Film Yearbook'), 1934, *ZWD*, p. 159.
14. See D. W. Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought, 1900–1950* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1971), p. 3.
15. Prasenjit Duara, 'Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity', see in particular pp. 75–81, and Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 95–110. On the anti-religion movement in China in the 1920s, see Jessie G. Lutz, Chinese Nationalism and the Anti-Christian Campaigns of the 1920s', *Modern Asian Studies*, 10:3, 1976, pp. 395–416, and Tatsuro Yamamoto and Sumiko Yamamoto, 'The Anti-Christian Movement in China, 1922–1927, *Far Eastern Quarterly*, 12:2, February 1953, pp. 133–147.
16. See Wan Cheng, 'Chajin shenguai pian' ('Proscribe Shenguai Pictures'), editorial in *Yingxi shenghuo* ('Film Life'), 1:8, March 1931, pp. 1–2.
17. See Kristine Harris, '"The Romance of the Western Chamber" and the Classical Subject in 1920s Shanghai', p. 56.
18. Jean Chesneaux, 'The Modern Relevance of Shui-hu Chuan', p. 2.
19. C. T. Hsia, 'The Military Romance', p. 349.
20. See Yang Junmai, 'Neizhengbu dianjian xingzheng gaikuang', in *ZWD*, pp. 161–163. For a brief description of the GMD's organs of censorship and dates of establishment, see Du Yunzhi's *Zhongguo dianying qishi nian* ('Seventy Years of Chinese Cinema'), (Taipei: Republic of China Film Library Press, 1986), pp. 142–143. See also 'Censorship and Film', in Yingjin Zhang and Zhiwei Xiao (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 108–110.
21. Cultural applications of the law involve the social operations of the Confucian notion of *li* (implying compromise and concessions on both sides) over the notion of *fa* (emphasising enforcement and the letter of the law). On *li* and *fa*, see Mary Lynne Calkins, 'Censorship in Chinese Cinema', *Hastings Communication and Entertainment Law Journal*, Vol. 21, 1998–1999, 239–338, 278–281.
22. See Zhiwei Xiao, 'Constructing a New National Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition, and Sex in the Nanjing Decade', in Yingjin Zhang (ed.), *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai*, pp. 183–199, esp. p. 192.
23. See Chen Mo, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi*, p. 82 and p. 90.
24. See Guo Youshou, 'Ershier nian zhi guochan dianying' ('Chinese Films in 1933'), *Zhongguo dianying nianjian* ('Chinese Film Yearbook'), 1934, in *ZWD*, p. 1046.
25. See Cheng Bugao, *Ying tan yi jiu* ('Reminiscences of the Film World'), (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1983), pp. 14–19.
26. Wu Yanyin, 'Jiao nei liang bu qian dianjian weihui zuzhi gaiyao,' ('Organisational Outline of the Ex-Film Censorship Committee of the Education and Interior Ministries'), *Zhongguo dianying nianjian* ('Chinese Film Yearbook'), 1934, in *ZWD*, p. 166.
27. Luo Gang, 'Zhongyang dianjianhui gongzuo gaikuang', *ZWD*, p. 167. Luo Gang was the director of the Central Film Censorship Committee.
28. Ibid., p. 168.
29. Ibid., p. 168.
30. Cheng Jihua, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, Vol. 1, p. 304.
31. Ibid., p. 303.
32. Ibid., p. 304.
33. See Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, p. 90.
34. Harriet Sergeant, *Shanghai*, p. 264.

35. See 'Shi yu xiao gongsi da bei jianchao' ('Ten and More Small Companies Raided') in *Dianying nianjian 1935* ('Film Yearbook 1935') (Shanghai: Diansheng Weekly Press, 1935), p. 62.
36. On the precepts of 'soft cinema' as propounded by Liu Na'ou, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 91–92. See also Cheng Jihua, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, Vol. 1, pp. 395–412.
37. See 'Xianggang daying shenguai pian' ('Hong Kong's Great Revival of Shenguai Pictures'), *Dianying nianjian 1935* ('Film Yearbook 1935') (Shanghai: Diansheng Weekly Press), p. 64.
38. 'Shi yu xiao gongsi da bei jianchao' ('Ten and More Small Companies Raided'), p. 62.
39. Zhiwei Xiao, 'Constructing a New National Culture', p. 192. See also Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927–1937*, unpublished PhD dissertation, San Diego, University of California, 1994, p. 238.
40. Jay Leyda in *Dianying: Electric Shadows* first used the translation of *gudao* as 'Orphan Island'. Poshek Fu translates the term as 'Solitary Island', perhaps a more precise rendition of *gudao* although it somehow misses the note of pathos inherent in the more metaphorical 'Orphan Island'. In the text, I will stick to the original Chinese *gudao*.
41. See Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying piping shi* ('History of Chinese Film Criticism, 1987–2000') (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007), p. 116.
42. See Poshek Fu, 'The Struggle to Entertain: The Political Ambivalence of Shanghai Film Industry under Japanese Occupation, 1941–1945', in Law Kar (ed.), *Cinema of Two Cities: Hong Kong-Shanghai*, 18th Hong Kong International Film Festival (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1994), pp. 50–62; and Fu, 'Projecting Ambivalence: Chinese Cinema in Semi-Occupied Shanghai, 1937–1941', in Wen-hsin Yeh (ed.), *Wartime Shanghai* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 86–100.
43. See Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and the Novel', in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 39–40.
44. See Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, pp. 130–131.
45. For an account of the Japanese-sponsored Chinese cinema in fully-occupied Shanghai and in other occupied areas of China (including tables of films produced in this period), see chapter 5 in Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi*, pp. 245–283. Of the films of this period, Li says that they did not possess propagandistic and political content, dealing mainly with 'matters relating to romance, family, society and life' but 'it is also a fact that their quality is not high' (p. 261).
46. Poshek Fu, 'The Struggle to Entertain', p. 50.
47. See Wen-hsin Yeh, 'Prologue: Shanghai Besieged, 1937–45', in Yeh (ed.), *Wartime Shanghai*, pp. 1–17, esp. pp. 4–5. See also Fu, 'Projecting Ambivalence', in the same volume, pp. 90–91.
48. See He Xiujun, 'Zhang Shichuan he Mingxing yingpian gongsi', in *ZWD*, p. 1540. According to Li Daoxin, the CFCC had approved the showing of the series after receiving repeated petitions from the film business community concerning the shortage of films for distribution in the *gudao*. See Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying wenhua shi*, p. 187.
49. See Cheng Jihua, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, Vol. 2, p. 97.
50. He Xiujun, 'Zhang Shichuan he Mingxing yingpian gongsi', *ZWD*, 1540.
51. See Jia Leilei, *Wu zhi wu: Zhongguo wuxia dianying de xingtai yu shenhun* ('The Dance of *Wu*: The Form and Mind of Chinese *Wuxia* Pictures') (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 1998), p. 31.
52. For a shortlist of *wuxia* films produced in the *gudao* period and in the occupation period, see Chen Mo, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi*, p. 90.

53. See Jubin Hu, ibid., p. 128. Poshek Fu adds that the GMD government had withdrawn the CFCC to Chongqing and 'paid little attention to cultural affairs in Shanghai, aside from using terrorism in the name of punishing traitors (*chujian*) to scare any possible collaborators, and the Japanese were trying to take control of the Shanghai film industry'. See Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 23.
54. See Gongsun Lu, *Zhongguo dianying shihua*, Vol. 2, p. 125.
55. See Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying piping shi*, p. 127. Li was quoting from criticism printed in a section 'Mulan congjun: jiaping ji' ('Mulan Joins the Army: Collection of Rave Reviews'), in *Xinhua huabao* ('Xinhua Pictorial'), 4:3, March 1939; see also Li, *Zhongguo dianying shi*, p. 195.
56. See Chang-tai Hung, 'Female Symbols of Resistance in Chinese Wartime Spoken Drama', *Modern China*, 15:2, April 1989, 149–177, esp. pp. 151–152.
57. Ibid., p. 171.
58. Madam Tong Yuejuan, Zhang Shankun's widow, and an actress herself in the Shanghai cinema, describes the Xinhua Company as 'a place in which filmmakers could realise their ideals; despite the onset of war, the company could continue to produce films and thus it entered its golden era' in the *gudao* period. See Zuo Guifang and Yao Liqun (ed.), *Tong Yuejuan huiyi lu ji tuwen ziliao huibian* ('Tong Yuejuan: Memoirs and Pictorial-Literary Materials') (Taipei: Chinese-Taipei Film Archive, 2001), p. 52.
59. See Poshek Fu, 'The Struggle to Entertain', p. 52.
60. Ibid., p. 52.
61. See Tan Zhongxia, *Chen Yunshang zhuan: Yiye huanghou* ('Nancy Chan, Queen Overnight') (Hong Kong: City Entertainment, 1996), p. 117.
62. See 'Guzhuang pian yinggai zhuyi de jidian' ('A Few Points to Note for the Period Costume Picture'), editorial in *Qingqing dianying* ('The Chin Chin Screen'), No. 4, 25 April 1939.
63. See Peng Yannong, 'Shengtao hanjian bailei' ('Denouncing Traitors'), editorial in *Yilin* ('Artland'), No. 68, 16 February 1940.
64. Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong*, p. 39.
65. Poshek Fu, 'The Struggle to Entertain', p. 53.
66. For a fuller analysis of the film, see Poshek Fu, 'Projecting Ambivalence,' pp. 93–98, and *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong*, pp. 11–21.
67. Quoted in a file report 'Chongqing guanzhong shaodiao Mulan congjun' ('Chongqing Audience Burns Mulan Joins the Army') by journalist Li Yuan, in *Yilin* ('Artland'), No. 68, 16 February 1940.
68. For a summary of the Nie Yinniang story, see James Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, pp. 89–90.
69. See *Yilin* ('Artland'), No. 68, 16 February 1940.
70. See Zuo and Yao, *Tong Yuejuan huiyi lu ji tuwen ziliao huibian*, p. 66.
71. See 'Zhang Shankun Bu Wancang dui "Mulan congjun" beifen shijian shengming' ('A Statement by Zhang Shankun and Bu Wancang re: Burning Reel Incident of Mulan Joins the Army'), *Yilin* ('Artland'), No. 72, 16 April 1940.
72. Warned by Kawakita to get out of Shanghai, Zhang and his family were travelling to Chongqing when he was arrested during a stopover in Tunxi. For an account of the circumstances of Zhang's arrest, see Tong Yuejuan's memoirs, *Tong Yuejuan huiyi lu ji tuwen ziliao huibian*, pp. 80–84.
73. See Poshek Fu, 'The Struggle to Entertain', p. 59. See also Tong Yuejuan's memoirs, *Tong Yuejuan huiyi lu ji tuwen ziliao huibian*, p. 79.
74. See Fu, 'Projecting Ambivalence', p. 102.
75. See Jia Leilei, *Wu zhi wu*, p. 36.

76. See, for example, Nan Man, 'Wuxia shenguai pian' ('*Wuxia Shenguai* Movies'), *Yinse shijie* ('Cinemart'), April 1970, p. 71. To this author, the indulgence of *shenguai* fantasy in modern *wuxia* pictures represented a backsliding, back to the time of *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*, and therefore should be condemned if not banned altogether. The author employs language not heard since the early 1930s in Shanghai. I quote: 'Such *shenguai* movies, shoddily made and instigating superstition, are a scourge on society, which is a kind of crime that should not be allowed to persist.'
77. Harriet Sergeant, *Shanghai*, p. 266.
78. See Yu Mo-wan, 'Swords, Chivalry and Palm Power: A Brief Survey of the Cantonese Martial Arts Cinema 1938–1970', in Lau Shing-hon (ed.), *A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film*, pp. 99–106.

3. THE RISE OF KUNG FU, FROM WONG FEI-HUNG TO BRUCE LEE

Just as the *shenguai wuxia* genre took root in Hong Kong's Cantonese cinema after the war, it was rather quickly displaced by a local tradition of martial arts action which came to be called 'Kung Fu'. The new genre was kicked off by a series of films based on the adventures of the real-life Cantonese martial arts hero Wong Fei-hung (Huang Feihong, in Pinyin). The essential marker of difference distinguishing the kung fu film from the *shenguai wuxia* film was its emphasis on 'real fighting'.

Director Wu Pang (Hu Peng in Pinyin) (1909–2000), who created the Wong Fei-hung series, explained that the reason why he forged a new direction in the Chinese martial arts cinema hitherto dominated by *shenguai wuxia* was because audiences were getting tired of the fantasy routines often shoddily staged and executed. In order to maintain interest, the producers of *shenguai wuxia* pictures attempted to spruce up their productions with directly animated cartoon images in colour, hand-drawn onto black-and-white prints. Wu writes:

> the fight sequences were composed of flying swords clashing with flying knives, whiskers versus gourds, magical ropes catching flying snakes, metal circles colliding with each other and giving off electric sparks. *Shenguai* and *wuxia* were mixed together in a pot, and in this way, producers hoped that the genre would survive.[1]

Moreover, the martial arts action was based on stage-influenced northern school fighting techniques.[2] Wu proposed that a film about a local hero using

southern styles of martial arts would be his generation's contribution to the 'rescue of the *wuxia* movie from its crisis'.[3] The rescue involved prising the genre away from the grip of *shenguai* fantasy. In stressing *wuxia* without the *shenguai*, Wu indicated that the new signifying system of martial arts action, namely kung fu, was drawn from the same historical topos of *xia* on which the *shenguai* pictures were also based.

The real-life hero Wong Fei-hung shares the same trait of knight-errant chivalry, using his martial prowess to help the needy and the oppressed, thus he has the same concern for the underdog as the traditional *wuxia* hero drawn from fiction. In fact, the heroic acts of Wong Fei-hung were first documented in the 'Guangdong school of *wuxia* fiction' that came into prominence in the 1930s. The Guangdong school is so named because, according to Ye Hongsheng, its authors use the Cantonese language as their prose style and their stories feature the heroes of the Southern Shaolin.[4] John Christopher Hamm notes that the Guangdong school is 'an example of direct textual continuity between the late Qing and Old School periods', and its production and circulation 'bridges the Old School/New School chronological divide as well'.[5]

Wong Fei-hung was therefore the model of an early twentieth-century *xia* warrior inheriting and passing on historicist topoi of patriarchy, celibacy, nationalism, and a Confucian ethos mixed with Buddhist principles of tolerance, virtue and patience, but within the body of a Cantonese language and identity. These character traits will be examined more closely below as they become embodied by the Cantonese actor Kwan Tak-hing who played Wong Fei-hung in a long running film series from 1949 to 1970, and re-examined as the character undergoes another reincarnation in the form of the non-Cantonese actor Jet Li who played Wong Fei-hung in a new film cycle in the 1990s. I will also examine the distinctions between northern and southern schools of martial arts, and how the concept of 'real fighting' came about and underwent a transition from its roots in formal theatrical tradition into becoming a style of innovative kung fu (or the claim of 'real kung fu') created solely for the cinema in the hands of Bruce Lee and such directors as Lau Kar-leong and John Woo in the 1970s.

The Beginnings of Hong Kong's Kung Fu Cinema

The first kung fu movie produced before the war was *Fang Shiyu da leitai* (*The Adventures of Fong Sai-yuk*, 1938), which presented a real-life kung fu hero, Fong Sai-yuk (in Pinyin: Fang Shiyu), whose legendary status is of nearly the same proportions as Wong Fei-hung (both figures were popularised through the serialised novels of the Guangdong school of *wuxia* fiction circulating in this period). Judged purely on documentary and circumstantial evidence since the film is no longer extant,[6] we may note a few precedents set by *The Adventures*

of Fong Sai-yuk. First, it featured a local Cantonese martial arts hero stemming from the Southern Shaolin tradition and thus highlights a fighting style that was highly distinctive and distinguishable from the northern tradition of *wuxia* based on Wudang and the Northern Shaolin. Second, a Cantonese opera star Sun Ma Si-tsang, played the hero, underscoring the southern cultural features of the genre. Third, the Fong Sai-yuk legend unfolded through the format of the serial adventure, released in several instalments. Although only one sequel to *The Adventures of Fong Sai-yuk* was produced in the prewar period, the Fong legend was revived after the war. Four Fong Sai-yuk films were released from 1948–1949 before the first Wong Fei-hung film was produced.

The Wong Fei-hung films developed on all these precedents. First, Wong Fei-hung was a local Cantonese legend; second, a Cantonese opera star, Kwan Tak-hing, would play Wong; and third, it would develop as a long-running series. Kwan's Cantonese identity and his training in Cantonese cultural forms such as opera was an important factor in the series, as I will show below. The Wong Fei-hung legend soon proved to be more potent than the Fong Sai-yuk legend, which was also revived in the 1990s with Jet Li playing the role of Fong Sai-yuk (in the 1970s, Fong Sai-yuk was the featured hero in a series of films directed by Zhang Che, who chose Alexander Fu Sheng to play Fong). Jet Li, as I have noted before, also played Wong Fei-hung, in Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* series. Li of course is non-Cantonese, and he invests the character with a different dimension of identity politics conditioned by Hong Kong's anxiety over its impending reunification with China in 1997, well discussed by Tony Williams,[7] so that the Cantonese identity of the character was less of a cultural factor or denominator of the success of the series.

The Wong Fei-hung series began with two instalments in 1949 under the collective title of *Huang Feihong zhengzhuan* (*The True Story of Wong Fei-hung*),[8] featuring Kwan Tak-hing as the eponymous hero. Its director Wu Pang had first learned of Wong Fei-hung when he was prodded by a friend, the Cantonese opera librettist and scenarist Ng Yat-siu, into reading a newspaper-serialised story about the historical Wong, while crossing Victoria Harbour on the Star Ferry. Wu became convinced that the subject was good material for a film. He sought out the writer of the article, Zhu Yuzhai, one of the key figures of the Guangdong school of *wuxia* fiction, who agreed to write a full-scale biography of Wong Fei-hung for the director with the intent of turning it into a screenplay.[9] Zhu's purported biography is essentially fiction built upon a slim framework of fact.

The Wong Fei-hung films constituted a virtual industry in itself, sustaining a corps of supporting players, martial arts stuntmen and directors who could specialise in kung fu as a genre. Simultaneously, its popularity sustained the whole Cantonese film industry: a distinctive feature of the industry at the time was that producers bid for the rights with director Wu Pang to make the films rather

than having one production company owning the franchise to the series. Financiers and producers in the Singapore-Malaysia market clamoured to invest in the series, thus embedding the practice of pre-selling rights in the Hong Kong film industry. Rights were pre-sold on the very image of Wong Fei-hung as a local cultural legend. Director Wu Pang explained that the prevalence of scenes showing Wong Fei-hung dancing the lion (or in some variations, dancing the unicorn) in the series was because such scenes were pre-shot before any script was written in order to sell the film to overseas investors.[10]

The identification of Wong as a local legend or regional hero also meant that the character belonged entirely in the realm of Cantonese cinema. The real Wong Fei-hung was a descendant of the southern martial arts school derived from the northern Shaolin Temple, adherents of whom included such legendary names as Fong Sai-yuk, Hung Hei-kwun, Wu Wai-kin, the monk Sande, and Lu Acai. They disseminated their own distinctive styles of martial arts into Guangdong and established new schools. 'The Adventures of Fong Sai-yuk' was the beginning of a trend by Hong Kong's filmmakers to depict these authentic local heroes and their idiosyncratic practice of martial arts. The intent of such films was to 'preserve and disseminate a range of putatively authentic martial arts postures and movements', as Hector Rodriguez reports.[11] An important contribution of the Wong Fei-hung films was 'the assistance of skilled martial artists trained in both Southern and Northern fighting styles',[12] which would imply to me that an implicit awareness of northern styles was written into the textual sign system of southern kung fu.

According to Zhu's biography, Wong Fei-hung (whose year of birth is variously given as either 1847 or 1855 by different scholars) was taught the martial arts from the age of six by his father Wong Kei-ying. Fei-hung learned the art of the Eight Trigram (*bagua*) long-staff fighting method that was invented by the fifth son of the fabled Yang family known in legend as Wulang: the hero of Lau Kar-leong's magnificent 1984 film *Wulang bagua gun* (*The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter*). Wulang became a monk and transmitted the technique to Lu Acai, one of the original Shaolin Temple disciples.[13] Lu taught the technique to his own disciple, Wong Kei-ying, who then passed the techniques to his son[14] (in Lau Kar-leong's 1976 film *Lu Acai yu Huang Feihong/Challenge of the Masters*, the legend is that Fei-hung learned the techniques from Lu Acai himself).

Wong Kei-ying's own formidable skills in the martial arts allowed him to become a coach to government troops stationed in Guangdong but since he was poorly paid for his services, he supplemented his income by becoming a roving herbalist. As a boy, Fei-hung accompanied his father on his trips around the province to sell medicines and performed martial arts to pull in the crowds. His mastery of the Eight-Trigram method of staff-fighting, among many other techniques, so amazed the public that he was immediately dubbed a wonder kid

(Fei-hung was then only twelve years old) and gave rise to a challenge from a member of a rival school. Taking up the challenge, Fei-hung defeated the rival, and this marked the beginning of his fame and legend.[15] The childhood adventures of Wong Fei-hung when travelling with his father Wong Kei-ying were the basis of Yuen Wo-ping's marvellous 1993 movie *Shaonian Huang Feihong zhi tie houzi* (*Iron Monkey*), which shows Fei-hung in his childhood years performing the pole-fighting technique, and the imitation of his father's own invention, the 'shadowless kick' (*wuxing jiao*).

Zhu's biography goes on to detail episode after episode of Wong's adventures in the province of Guangdong and in Hong Kong from his teenage years to adulthood. The biography makes clear that Wong Fei-hung's fame was entirely founded on his prowess in the martial arts and that since his teenage years, Fei-hung was primarily responsible for the upkeep of the family reputation and its livelihood. Wong Fei-hung died in the 1920s (either 1920 or 1924) leaving behind a legend that celebrated his life as martial artist, kung fu coach and medical practitioner.

'Printing the Legend' of Wong Fei-hung

Prior to its appearance in the cinema, the Wong Fei-hung legend was perpetuated in print by Zhu Yuzhai's 'biography' through serialisation in the newspapers in the late 1940s, but the legend was already popular at least a decade earlier through the works of the 'Guangdong school' novelists Deng Yugong and Gao Xiaofeng.[16] To his legions of fans, the name of Wong Fei-hung was circulated among devotees of the martial arts, some of whom had trained under Wong's disciples, such as Lam Sai-wing, who ran their own martial arts schools (as far as I know, Lam Sai-wing was the only one of Wong's disciples who had a film devoted to his adventures outside of the Wong Fei-hung series: Yuen Wo-ping's *Lin Shirong/The Magnificent Butcher*, released in 1979). It was the cinema that disseminated the legend to a wider public and this cinematic legend has proven to be particularly durable and agile. Despite his real-life antecedence, new generations of movie fans would know Wong Fei-hung purely as a screen personality rather than a genuine historic figure.

The character of Wong Fei-hung is a case of the cinema 'printing the legend', to borrow the immortal phrase from John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), indicating that the character is largely a fabrication but one which has endured and ingrained itself deeply in the consciousness of cinematic culture and in popular folklore. From 1949 to 1998, more than a hundred feature films featuring the Wong Fei-hung character were produced. Those starring Kwan Tak-hing alone number up to seventy-seven from the end of the 1940s to the 1970s;[17] and Kwan also played the role in a TV series in the late 1970s, demonstrating that the precedent of the long running series in the

cinema would now be appropriated by television. The year 1956 was the record year in Wong Fei-hung releases: a total of twenty-five films, averaging two a month. Kwan played the character as a mature hero and he continued to play the character up to his old age.

As Kwan Tak-hing grew older, the image of Wong Fei-hung as a stern, Confucianist patriarch became more ingrained. The Confucian prototype of the 'superior gentleman' (*junzi*) is embodied by Kwan's personification, and proceeding from his portrayal are qualities of fairness, moderation, social conservatism – all qualities he exuded forever after. The Confucian tenets of respect for elders and a hierarchal order of human relationships are underscored by Wong Fei-hung's status as a master and his relationships with his disciples. Because he played the character in seventy-seven films in the old series from 1949–1970, and was directed most of the time by Wu Pang, Kwan's Wong Fei-hung is a consistent cinematic personality who stood his ground on Confucianist principles of *yi* (righteousness), stressing the value of a man doing what a man ought to do, in the Chinese way. Kung fu was the means to achieve a just result, but the right use of kung fu was dependent on one's character, based on ideals of *yi* and *ren* (human-heartedness).

In the late 1970s, Jackie Chan played Wong Fei-hung as a precocious kung fu brat in *Zui quan* (*Drunken Master*, 1979), one of a number of films dealing with Wong's early life from childhood to young adulthood (fifteen years later, a much older Chan played the same juvenile character in the sequel *Zui quan II*/*Drunken Master II* released in 1994). The way that Chan played the role, Wong was hardly the staunch disciplinarian that he was made out to be in adult life. In the nineties, Wong Fei-hung was played by Jet Li in a completely revamped series that appeared from 1991–94 under the English title *Once Upon a Time in China*, produced by Tsui Hark, who directed the first three and the best episodes of the series (Li was replaced by Vincent Zhao after the third episode).

Li's persona was quite different from that of Kwan Tak-hing's. He played Wong Fei-hung as a youngish Chinese gentleman apparently open to Western ideas and concepts though remaining a staunch patriot and nationalist (as Tony Williams puts it very well, he is 'ultimately at home with both his national identity and the idea that he needs to accommodate himself to a wider world beyond his original homeland'[18]). Since the legend is moulded to suit different epochs and the personalities of different actors, we should consider what the legend perpetuates, assuming that the 'printed legend' is the one constant factor in all the Wong Fei-hung films.

Though the format of an ongoing series depicting Wong Fei-hung having adventures in various townships throughout Guangdong province makes him an itinerant character in the tradition of *youxia* (roving knight-errant), the image of Wong is that of a master with an established niche and a core

following of disciples. He is the patriarchal figure within his immediate niche centred in the apothecary named Po Chi Lam, where he keeps and trains his disciples and dispenses medicine to his patients and clients. The patriarchal focus is a distinctive trait of the series and it highlights two or three things: first, the master – disciple relationship as another historicist element of *wuxia* developed strongly in the cinema, and second, the hard-school techniques of kung fu fighting which appear to dictate an almost exclusive male dominance in the ranks of Wong's disciples – and very rarely does a male master take on a female disciple. Third, perhaps, the patriarchal theme informs another aspect to the Wong legend which is the incessant rivalry between the different schools (another stalwart of the series was the actor Sek Kin who embodied the perennial villain and rival to Wong Fei-hung; and like Kwan Tak-hing, Sek Kin also had personal training in the martial arts), and the constant indiscipline of the disciples which entails the necessary presence of a authoritarian master and patriarch to impose order on the 'family' (as Jeff Takacs has shown, members of a martial arts tradition are very much like Chinese families and are organised according to their generations[19]).

Wong's Po Chi Lam is recurrently beset with challenges from rival schools and masters, northern and southern – and this kind of internecine rivalry and conflict was invariably resolved by Wong's superiority in the martial arts, but more importantly by his integrity of character. In *The Magnificent Butcher*, there is a marvellous scene in which Kwan Tak-hing's Wong Fei-hung subdues Master Ko from a rival school through a duel of writing brushes. Wong fends off Ko who tries to blot Wong's calligraphy as he writes the phrase, *renzhe wudi* ('The Benevolent is Invincible'). Here, the master-figure is defined by his Confucianism (the operating principle of which is *ren*, benevolence) but also by his love of nation. Wong is identified as a supporter of the Nationalist revolution seeking to overthrow the Qing dynasty – and the incessant rivalry between schools essentially denotes the fractious atmosphere of Chinese society marking the end of the Qing dynasty and the transition to the Republic.

The master persona of Wong Fei-hung is as much a political image as a kung fu one; thus next to his image as a kung fu fighter, Wong is a nationalist, of Republican vintage. This is evident in the Kwan Tak-hing persona but is especially prominent in the Jet Li persona of Wong Fei-hung, as portrayed in Tsui Hark's *Huang Feihong zhi er: nan'er dang ziqiang* (*Once Upon a Time in China, Part Two*, 1992) where Wong Fei-hung prevents the Manchus from arresting Sun Yat-sen, the father of the Republican revolution. Wong Fei-hung is an atypical nationalistic figure in the kung fu cinema set in the transition period from the late Qing to the Republic.

The quality of nationalism is inherent in the practice of martial arts, as designated by the Mandarin term *guoshu* to signify martial arts, which as John Christopher Hamm observes, is a term employed in the Republican era to

enshrine 'a project of reinventing martial traditions in the service of nationalistic self-strengthening'.[20] *Guoshu* bounds all practitioners to make one's body strong in order to make the country strong through upholding the values in martial arts that would protect the social fabric and ensure the security of the nation. Such nationalism in the Wong Fei-hung persona echoes the debate in the 1920s of 'New Heroism' as a concept that could revivify the nation through a renewed emphasis on militarism, discussed in Chapter 1.

This same echo reverberates throughout the first three editions of Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* series.[21] But it is particularly resonant in the pre-credits prologue to the first edition where Jet Li's Wong Fei-hung sees off the general Liu Yongfu on board a ship carrying Liu to Vietnam to do battle with the French (like Wong Fei-hung, Liu is a real historical figure, famed for his role in the Sino–French War of 1884–1885). Wong witnesses a lion dance performed as part of the send-off ceremony. When firecrackers are ignited, French marines in an adjoining ship mistake the noise for gunfire and they return fire, wounding the man who dances the lion head. As the man falls, Wong catches the head of the lion and resumes the dance, which symbolically ends with the lion consuming a hung offering known as the *qing* (literally, the green), usually concealing a red packet of money, but here the red packet, a parting gift for Liu, contains a written couplet: 'Great ideals soar to the clouds, The essence (*qi*) of *xia* fills the sky'. In return, Liu presents Wong with a fan on which the words 'unequal treaties' are printed over a map of China.[22]

The legacy of the Wong Fei-hung cinematic persona is a prerequisite nationalism which is associated with the concept of *xiaqi* (essence of *xia*). All kung fu heroes are nationalistic in some degree or other but Wong Fei-hung is the prototypical personification of nationalistic *xia* in the cinema, setting the standard for the latter portrayals of nationalistic kung fu heroes such as Huo Yuanjia (as played by Jet Li in Ronny Yu's 2006 film, *Fearless*) and Chen Zhen (played by Bruce Lee in *Fist of Fury*). I have argued elsewhere that the nationalism of kung fu heroes and martial arts cinema in general engenders a sense of 'abstract nationalism' in Chinese audiences who do not live in China itself.[23] It gives to these diasporic audiences the possibility for identification with a China that exists only in the imagination and is effectively an imagined nationalism, following Benedict Anderson's contention that a nation is 'an imagined political community . . . because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.[24]

This *imagined* nationalism has a transnational reach since it binds together ethnic Chinese who do not live in China and are nationals of other countries but who nevertheless imagines a certain vision of China as a 'mother country'.[25] Hong Kong's kung fu cinema has played a role in the construction of this imagined nationalism or what I have called abstract nationalism, inasmuch as it is a

kind of nationalism that is not tied either to Mainland China or Taiwan, from the vantage point of Hong Kong. Other critics have used more conceptual, psychoanalytical terms to refer to the correlation between nationalism and kung fu. In the words of Siu Leung Li, kung fu is a '*cultural imaginary*' evoked by Hong Kong filmmakers as a symbolic expression to 'reassert a *Chinese subject* in modern times.'[26] The emphases are mine, and the words point out the link between the 'imaginary' and the 'Chinese subject'.

Li tells us that the Wong Fei-hung series was one of the 'major constitutive elements of Hong Kong popular culture'.[27] As a product of Hong Kong cinematic imagination, Wong Fei-hung's nationalism is informed and complicated by Hong Kong's special status as a territory located within and without China. Abstract or imaginary, the nationalism of the Wong Fei-hung films is not a simple, one-dimensional proposition. They transmit a sense of Chinese nationalism together with perceptions of autochthonism and xenophobia. They may in fact have more to do with localism and regionalism, or even a wider Cantonese chauvinism – but to call the films provincial may be to denigrate them. Nationalism, as Prasenjit Duara tells us, 'is rarely the nationalism of *the nation*, but rather marks the site where different representations of the nation contest and negotiate with each other'.[28]

The Wong Fei-hung films present as much a vantage view of *Cantonese* nationalism as they also offer a general approval of *Chinese* nationalism. Both nationalisms revolve around 'China' and are far less contradictory than one may think because of the central role played by Guangdong in the forming of the Republic: Sun Yat-sen was himself a Cantonese and he later formed a militarist government in Guangzhou with the aim of reunifying the whole of China through a military campaign which came to be known as the Northern Expedition.[29]

Hector Rodriguez reiterates the claim often made about the Wong Fei-hung films, that they had a 'self-imposed mission . . . to protect the traditional sources of Cantonese cultural identity from the ravages of time and circumstance': the films would function as archival records of 'precious folk traditions that might not survive China's rapid transition to modernity'.[30] This suggests to me that the nation itself, China, poses a threat to Cantonese culture, and of course, it should be recalled that the GMD government had banned Cantonese films in 1937. Whether or not the Wong Fei-hung films functioned as ethnography and actually served the purpose of protecting and preserving Cantonese cultural identity is open to further investigation – and many of the films in the series appear not to have been preserved themselves, perhaps due to the perception of bad quality (most of the films were shoddily made in quick time).

If the Wong Fei-hung films are 'Chinese' in the broad sense, they are reflective of a Chinese-ness still in its formative stage. The historical background of the Wong Fei-hung films reveals a Chinese nation still under construction in that it had to be put together again after the overthrow of the Qing. The shaky foun-

dations of the Republic, the era of warlordism, the fractiousness of the GMD regime (and the separatism of the Guangdong GMD in 1931), the invasion of Manchuria by Japan, war with Japan, the civil war with the CCP, have all contributed to the tenuousness of the modern nation-state, and the concept of nationalism itself is therefore still tentative. The invocation of a Chinese nationalism in the Wong Fei-hung films suggests something still evolving. It is in this sense that it may not be amiss to speak of an essentialism or transcendent cultural identity – *wuxia* being a signifier of such.

Wong Fei-hung as a *wuxia* hero designates an essentialist identity composed of multiple traits, which is somehow fixed but transhistorical. Here, it might be more useful to regard Wong Fei-hung's Confucianism as a sign of transcendent cultural identity, or to put it another way, a sign of Chinese cosmopolitanism rather than nationalism.[31] The Confucianism of the character certainly suggests values in the genre less political if not less contentious, and it moves the series more towards the characteristic didacticism and paternalism of Cantonese cinema in this period. Thus, Wong Fei-hung seemed primarily occupied with ethical behaviour and he always tried to be the perfect model of a Confucian gentleman even when under attack (I will refer to an example of this later below).

As a sign of the Confucian morality that binds him, Kwan's Wong Fei-hung persona adds a further level of celibacy to the character which has become a stock concept in the portrayal of kung fu characters in general. The principle of celibacy is associated with the Shaolin Temple and the view that martial arts emanating from this tradition necessitate a thorough concentration of mind and body. Buddhism itself emphasises abstinence inherent in the virtues of tolerance and forbearance, and it forbids carnal knowledge as one of its commandments. The image of Wong Fei-hung as a celibate knight-errant is in keeping with such virtues. As such, Wong Fei-hung is an archetypal knight-errant, bearing out Y. W. Ma's comment that the 'observance of sexual Puritanism is an obligatory code which a Chinese knight-errant should hesitate to violate'.[32]

Any martial hero who violates the code does so at his own peril, as demonstrated in Lau Kar-leong's *Wuguan* (*Martial Club*, 1981) about the young Wong Fei-hung and his mate Wang Yinlin, who gets into deep trouble because he goes to the brothel and brags about his kung fu prowess to the girls. A girl asks him to perform kung fu and he replies, 'kung fu is to be performed in bed', and he proceeds to grab two bowls with his bare hands, as if grabbing the breasts of a woman, and breaks them, startling the girl, whom he consoles by saying 'I am not grabbing you'. The whole implication is that sex harms the body: the scene ends in Yinlin falling into a trap laid by rival members of another school who breaks one of his legs, which is symbolic inasmuch as kung fu involves both the arms and the legs in fighting. Wong Fei-hung might have learned his lesson there. In him, we see the prototype of a celibate

knight-errant, the standard of later cinematic knights-errant, whether of the kung fu variety or that of the swordsman in *wuxia* films (cf. Bruce Lee, Jimmy Wang Yu, Di Long, David Chiang, Jackie Chan, and Chow Yun-fat in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*).

I would argue that perhaps even more than the nationalism, the characteristic of Wong as a celibate hero is an important indicator of the shared heritage of *wuxia* and kung fu. It provides the continuity of Wong Fei-hung's character from Kwan Tak-hing to Jet Li. Li's characterisation may differ from Kwan Tak-hing's in substantial ways but in at least the aspect of Wong as a celibate hero, there is ultimately no difference because of the ingrained tradition of celibacy that we associate with the kung fu heroes hailing from the Shaolin school. Wong Fei-hung as portrayed by Kwan and Li is a no-nonsense ascetic self-disciplinarian, a stoic master surrounded mostly by males, demanding strictness and discipline of himself and his followers. Apart from his disciples, Wong Fei-hung does not appear to have his own family although in real life he was a married man (a fact mentioned in Zhu Yuzhai's biography), and, according to Kwan Tak-hing, had five wives.[33]

The first film in the series *The True Story of Wong Fei-hung: Whiplash Snuffs the Candle Flame* (1949) contains a romantic episode in which Wong forms an attachment to a lady who nurses him back to health after he receives a wound from an assailant (the wounded Wong having run away, comes into a cul-de-sac and is offered shelter in the lady's house). This sequence shows Wong in a vulnerable state both physically and emotionally, quite untypical of the series that later developed. In the *Once Upon a Time in China* series, Wong is seen carrying on a modish infatuation with the Aunt Yee character, played by Rosamund Kwan, but like Kwan Tak-hing's Wong Fei-hung, Li's characterisation is basically into sexual self-denial.[34]

The Aunt Yee character is an interesting anomaly since she too can be linked to the tradition of the female knight-errant: her Chinese name is 'Shisan yi', meaning Thirteenth Aunt, recalling none other than Thirteenth Sister ('Shisan mei') of the novel *A Tale of Heroic Lovers*. Her name demonstrates that female characters in the martial arts cinema are never far from the *wuxia* model of the female knight-errant. However, if we see Aunt Yee as a successor of Thirteenth Sister, it is through that side of her character which shows her femininity, as in the second half of the novel where Thirteenth Sister reaffirms her respect for the patriarchy and demonstrates loyalty and fidelity to her husband (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of the character and the novel).

Although she is not portrayed as a knight-errant figure, Aunt Yee's character increasingly assumes that role – as Tony Williams points out, she 'develops added resilience in each part of the series': a 'Western-educated damsel in distress in the first film, she uses one of Huang's techniques to throw an assailant off the boat at the end of the second'; in Part Six, 'she rides on horseback and

uses Huang's triple shadow-kick technique against hostile Indians'; and so on and so forth.[35] In assessing this relationship, film scholar Kwai-Cheung Lo asserts that Aunt Yee is an '"intruder" who perturbs the order of the fraternal bond' on which Wong Fei-hung has had a strong hold.[36]

To a male knight-errant figure, the female sex is not allowed to intrude into the 'order of the fraternal bond' unless they do so as near-equals, meaning that they are also adept in martial arts. In Yuen Wo-ping's *Iron Monkey*, the eponymous character who is a Robin Hood figure by night and medical doctor by day, has a female companion who appears every bit as proficient in the martial arts as he is. In one scene, they do a martial arts equivalent of a *pas de deux*, leaping and whirling in mid-air to retrieve paper blown up by the wind, a scene that is as near to a lovemaking scene as kung fu cinema can get. In the *Once Upon a Time in China* series, Aunt Yee may be fairly unorthodox in her relationship with Wong Fei-hung because of her Western education, but Wong is always careful to observe decorum, and he is never seen making love to her (the only way that Wong could 'legitimately have an affair' with a woman, as Kwai-Cheung Lo points out, is for Wong to lose his memory and forget that he is a Chinese hero, as he does in Part 6 of the series, *Huang Feihong zhi xiyu xiongshi/Once Upon a Time in China and America*, released in 1997[37]).

By tradition therefore, the kung fu hero is usually a celibate hero, a fundamental principle that is largely adhered to by latter stars from Bruce Lee to Jet Li. Even though these latter-day actors are sometimes depicted having relations with the opposite sex as a result of adapting traditional Chinese martial arts to modern times (for instance, Jimmy Wang Yu making love to Western women in *The Man from Hong Kong*, released in 1975, as a reworking of the Chinese kung fu hero into an Oriental version of James Bond), I would still maintain that it is quite rare to see scenes of kung fu heroes actually making love. Celibacy as a characteristic of the martial arts genre stems from the Buddhist practice of abstinence being one of the pillars reinforcing the moral foundation of the martial artist hero (sexual abstinence 'was probably at first regarded as a health measure', as C. T. Hsia suggests[38]), but since the world of the martial arts is traditionally dominated by men, celibacy, ironically, tends to reaffirm the traditional norms of the patriarchy and its normative standards of polygamy and having as many children as possible, preferably sons. Hence we might see celibacy as one of the more striking anomalies of the cinematic *xia* personality.

The Wong Fei-hung films were the earliest manifestations of the martial arts genre's focus on the male although in some instances, the series featured female fighters as protagonists. Writing about *Once Upon a Time in China*, Kwai-Cheung Lo notes that women could not have had any impact on the 'solidity of the patriarchal system and the brotherly bondage that constitutes it.'[39] This lack of the female impact is as much a concept perpetrated by the cinematic legend of Wong Fei-hung as it is a reference to the social system of the patriarchy

in traditional China. The longevity of the Wong Fei-hung series ensured a male dominance in the martial arts. In the 1960s, Zhang Che refashioned the ideal of male dominance and brotherly bondage to deal more with ideas of individual heroism than the collective spirit embodied in Wong Fei-hung's Confucian-nationalist ethos.

Real Kung Fu

The central feature of the Wong Fei-hung films would turn on 'real fighting' or 'real kung fu' (*zhen gongfu*), raising an epistemological question about the nature of the genre. I should point out that such terms were employed by the filmmakers and performers themselves to describe what they had constructed on the screen, and in turn, fans of the genre are complicit in their expectations that what they are seeing is real. Western theorists of film might find these terms troubling, since 'real fighting' and 'real kung fu' in the cinema are patently not real. More accurately, they are *representations* of the real, involving different forms of resemblance and performance and a high degree of choreography (at most, one might speak of edited fragments of real-time kung fu performances).

Aaron Anderson's thesis of kinaesthetic understanding of martial arts violence rests on an 'intellectual understanding that the violence itself is entirely representational'.[40] On the other hand, Leon Hunt has given an account of various kinds of 'authenticity' in the kung fu film (he offers three types: '*archival*, *cinematic* and *corporeal*' – emphases his),[41] supporting in his own way the assertion of 'real kung fu'. Hunt refers to the customary use of long takes in the fight sequences and the 'corporeal authenticity' of the actors' bodies ('measured by stuntwork and physical risk as much as fighting ability'[42]) which we might take to be some of the conditions ensuring real kung fu on the screen.

The idea of real kung fu may really be a matter of 'projective illusion' to use Richard Allen's term, whereby 'the fiction appears to unfold before our eyes as we watch, as if it were live, as if it were created in the moment of projection'[43] (a qualification may be made, which is that the kung fu technique is not supposed to be fiction). Allen adds, 'what affords a projective illusion of the projected moving image is that our awareness of the photographic basis of the image is overridden by the combination of movement, sound, and projection'.[44] On these conditions, kung fu films are kinetic, they are noisy, and they certainly project if we take projection as a metaphor of action (and we might even refer to the projection of the body), all of which combine to create our expectations of 'real kung fu'.

The claim of authenticity or that of 'real kung fu', it must be said, mirrors the claims of writers in the Guangdong school of *wuxia* fiction that they were writing 'real', 'true' and 'authentic' biographies of Wong Fei-hung, and it also mirrors the historicist practice in which writer-historians were writing factual

history even when they were writing fiction. In the Chinese conception of history, fact and fiction, history and myth, are interwoven in such a way that the reader cannot tell them apart. The history of *wuxia* literature, from the period of the Tang tales onwards, is that both author and reader are somehow complicit in the weaving of historical events, real figures, fiction and fact, into a narrative so compelling that historicity is sacrificed and what ensues is a historicism of truth and authenticity. This conceit of *wuxia* is now grafted onto the kung fu cinema in terms of an opposition between reality and make-believe (and, it must be recalled, advocates of kung fu assert that it stresses reality over the fantasy of *wuxia*[45]).

In general, critics have referred to the Wong Fei-hung films as representative of the 'realist' strand of martial arts in comparison with the 'fantastic' strand of the *shenguai wuxia* adventure serials.[46] Special effects were utilised in the fantasy strand that employed the craft of direct animation, giving the films an aesthetic look that is quite different from the austere realism of the Wong Fei-hung kung fu movies. Denoted as the realist school, the Wong Fei-hung films represented kung fu as a technology that stood in strong contrast to the visual effects of the *shenguai* mode. Kwai-Cheung Lo provides an erudite view of kung fu as technology: 'It is the human body that has been turned into a fighting machine – probably the only technology that is invented, developed and manipulated by Chinese in modern times'.[47] 'Starting from the seventies', Lo claims, 'the portrayal of kung fu in Hong Kong cinema has sprung forth to a very "present technology" of the time.'[48]

Lo suggests that kung fu had 'come to presence' as a technology in Hong Kong cinema, and the defining moment is the presence of Bruce Lee, 'who turns himself into a total weapon to vanquish his foreign contenders on screen'.[49] However, it was the Wong Fei-hung films which first brought details of real fist-fighting and authentic unarmed combat techniques, such as the traditional 'Hong Fist' (*hong quan*) and the 'shadowless kick' (both trademarks of the real Wong Fei-hung), into presence. The first two films in the series introduced martial arts unique to the south, such as the Tiger-Crane technique of fist-fighting and the pole-fighting method of Wulang, which required specialists to perform.[50] There is often a reminder or demonstration of the hard training required to gain mastery of such techniques, though the films usually ended up as moral object lessons going beyond just mere displays of kung fu.

By stressing kung fu as technology, the Wong Fei-hung films appeared to reject the film technology of visual effects that branded the *shenguai wuxia* movies. As fantasy adventure serials, the latter featured swordplay with a focus on the manipulation of various types of hand weapons as well as newfangled flying paraphernalia such as flying darts, missiles and arrows. In addition, the heroes and heroines possessed powers of flight and levitation: they could appear and disappear by means of weightless leaps and could also fly through mountains

and woods, feats achieved by crude wires that were used to haul actors up hundreds of feet into the air. The makers of the Wong Fei-hung series had sought to distinguish themselves from precisely such fake-technological feats by emphasising the exquisite martial arts of the various schools and their realistic or pragmatic styles that could be adopted for self-defence and healthy exercise.

Seen today, the choreography of the action sequences in both the realist and fantastic strands during this period appears largely stage bound. 'As far as representation goes', writes critic Liu Damu, 'there is a preference for single, extended takes to show the duels; the effect is not unlike a martial arts documentary.'[51] The staginess was a result of the practice of employing opera actors and acrobats, known as *longhu wushi* (literally, Dragon-Tiger Martial Masters) to stage the action. In Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s, both the opera and film worlds invoked the name of the Dragon-Tiger Martial Masters whenever bits of action were needed and performers were required to rebound on stage, do somersaults and leaps, simulate fights or stand in for the main actors. Lau Kar-leong (himself a second-generation Dragon-Tiger master) told me that the name was adopted by a group of Cantonese opera performers originally known as 'Five Army Tigers' (*wu junhu*). They performed special acrobatics and martial arts on stage but when it came to billing themselves on marquees and playbills, the original name didn't sound right (at least in Cantonese) and so it was changed to 'The Dragon-Tiger Martial Masters' (*longhu wushi*).[52]

Some of the original members of the Dragon-Tiger Martial Masters came from the north and for this reason, the name *longhu wushi* is sometimes associated with northern martial arts and the northern regional operas though, as Lau Kar-leong has maintained, the name is generically applied to the martial artist-acrobats in Cantonese opera. In time, the Dragon-Tiger Martial Masters came to be used for all northerners and southerners in the trade. The Wong Fei-hung films, in particular, employed Dragon-Tiger Martial Masters such as the northerner Yuan Xiaotian, and southerner Lau Tsam, Lau Kar-leong's father, to stage and choreograph kung fu bits of business. As a second-generation 'dragon-tiger master', Lau Kar-leong also appeared with his father in many Wong Fei-hung movies and he later became known as a martial arts director in the 1960s, and a director in his own right from 1975 onwards.

The dragon-tiger masters mixed opera techniques from the northern school (*bei pai*) with kung fu techniques of the southern school (*nan pai*), a sign of the hybridity of the martial arts that increasingly marked the genre's development. Lau Kar-leong recalled that the speciality of the northern school was to stage 'false kung fu', meaning that the prevailing wisdom at the time was to avoid using real kung fu for reasons of safety and to stage fight scenes in such a stylised manner that antagonists would fall down even before they were hit.[53]

Such stage-bound effects were supposed to simulate the sensation of real fighting. The staginess would be familiar to many in the audience at the time. Many

would be avid patrons of live opera where performances of 'operabatics' staged by the Dragon-Tiger Masters customarily unfolded in long sequences without breaks, in real displays of skill, strength and dexterity. However, in the *shenguai wuxia* films, such displays merely appeared stagy because of their focus on supernatural prowess and imaginative fantasy. Artificiality was compounded by the operatic techniques of the northern school (*bei pai*), stage techniques that were mechanically copied on the screen so that the term *bei pai* almost became a synonym for artifice or staginess, as Lau Kar-leong has pointed out.

The kung fu techniques employed in the Wong Fei-hung series were ostensibly *nan pai* (southern school). However, the films also featured northern school techniques because of the hybrid nature of the Dragon-Tiger Masters. So what made them particularly regional and parochial? The answer is their evocations of Cantonese folk culture: depictions of religious practices, festivals, traditional arts of healing and medicine, the performances of lion and unicorn dances that symbolise unity, prosperity and happiness for the community.

The lion dances were usually performed by Kwan Tak-hing himself: one more sign of the actor's uncanny incarnation of Wong Fei-hung, who was known as an expert lion dancer. Aside from these local features, the use of plots revolved around questions of moral duty and ethics in the martial arts (the lion dance as a constituent part of the martial arts, involves its own code of ethics, as Lau Kar-leong personally explains in the prologue of *Martial Club*), which I would argue, bolsters the concept of realism. In the final analysis, realism in the kung fu cinema indicates that kung fu is a way of life. Wong Fei-hung was always portrayed as a man of Confucian substance and strong principles, showing that the real essence of kung fu is to live a life of moral duty.

As a man of principle, Wong does not resort to kung fu for the sake of it. He wards off enemies as much by his moral character as by force of arms (and then, only as a last resort). Thus, in the 1968 entry, *Huang Feihong weizhen wu Yangcheng* (*Wong Fei-hung: The Incredible Success in Canton*), actor Sek Kin, the perennial heavy of the series, pours hot tea on Master Wong's head to provoke him, but the Master abides by the principle of Confucian tolerance and is not provoked, sitting calmly as the tea is poured over his head.[54] At the end of *Huang Feihong Tianhou miao jin xiang* (*Wong Fei-hung Attends the Joss Stick Festival at the Heavenly Goddess Temple*, 1956), after defeating his opponent, Master Fu (Sek Kin) in the climactic fight, Wong Fei-hung humbly apologises to him and proceeds to tend to his wounded arm. Unimpressed and unrepentant, Master Fu seizes the opportunity for revenge: he picks up a shard from a broken cup and cuts Wong Fei-hung's face. Startled and hurt, Wong quickly settles into his usual poise of tolerance and smiles at his assailant, asserting his humility and asking to be forgiven before he can depart with peace of mind. Master Fu, disarmed by Wong's benevolence, finally breaks down and asks for Wong's forgiveness.

Finally, the Confucian essence of Wong Fei-hung's character makes him a universal Chinese character, one who is able to cross over from being a Cantonese local hero to being a Mandarin personage, as I would call the Jet Li characterisation of Wong Fei-hung in the *Once Upon a Time in China* series, as well as characterisations by other non-Cantonese actors. The Wong Fei-hung films continued to be produced up until the decline of the Cantonese cinema in the late 1960s.

As Mandarin cinema became predominant, Wong Fei-hung was reconstructed as a Mandarin-speaking character, first, in Shaw Brothers' *Huang Feihong* (*The Master of Kung Fu*), released in 1973, where he was played by character actor Gu Feng, a northerner. Shaws' rival, Golden Harvest, was compelled to put out its own Mandarin version of a Wong Fei-hung picture, *Huang Feihong Shaolin quan* (*The Skyhawk*), released in 1974, featuring none other than Kwan Tak-hing himself, who was reported to be affronted when Shaw Brothers considered him too old to play the part in *The Master of Kung Fu*,[55] which, as it turned out, proved to be inferior and therefore failed to launch another cycle of Wong Fei-hung movies in Mandarin, clearly the intent of Shaw Brothers, although at least one other movie was made by the studio, *Huang Feihong yiqu ding cai pao* (*The Rivals of Kung Fu*), released in 1974.

The Mandarinisation of Wong Fei-hung came about because, ironically, the old series featuring Wong Fei-hung were now considered, in the era of 'new school' *wuxia*, antiquated and stagy. Shaw Brothers sought to renew the series by staging more 'realistic' fights and more 'authentic' detail of early Republican society in Guangdong.[56] The updating of Wong Fei-hung was also an evident feature of Jet Li's portrayal of the character in the 'Once Upon a Time in China' series: Li's persona being that of a Mandarin-speaking actor and martial artist (though in his Hong Kong films, he is usually dubbed into Cantonese). From Wong Fei-hung to Huang Feihong (the Mandarin tones of Wong's name by which he would be known to Chinese audiences outside of Hong Kong through Jet Li's portrayal), the character has proven to be the most resilient reference point of the kung fu genre in the Hong Kong cinema.

Bruce Lee and the 1970s Kung Fu Craze

Bey Logan, author of *Hong Kong Action Cinema*, notes that as each new generation re-examines the Wong Fei-hung phenomenon through new films featuring the same character, 'these new films reflect the changes that have taken place in southern Chinese society.'[57] Logan might rather have said that they reflect the changes that have taken place within the Hong Kong cinema. For over two decades, the Kwan Tak-hing-Wong Fei-hung films entertained the audience with 'real kung fu' as derived from the traditions passed on by true disciples of past masters. Then, there were the traditions derived from opera stagecraft, as practised by the Dragon-Tiger Masters.

Second-generation Dragon-Tiger masters developed into professional second units (the martial arts action second unit or action-choreography unit headed by a director) that are now incorporated into the whole filmmaking business. The actors, stunt players and directors of contemporary martial arts cinema are now drawn from a film tradition of martial arts and no longer from the stage. Thus, the Wong Fei-hung films, which I have earlier described as stemming from the stage and opera tradition where the fighting was choreographed in a stylised manner to simulate 'real kung fu' must be seen as the precursors of the even more realistic and brutal kung fu fighting style of Bruce Lee.

Bruce Lee, in his own fashion, kept up the spirit of the Cantonese revival, though his pictures were spoken in Mandarin (with Lee's dialogue dubbed), because he was himself Cantonese and had been trained in Wing Chun, as the director Zhang Che notes in his memoirs.[58] Lee was born in San Francisco in 1940, and was taken to Hong Kong where he began a career as a child actor. He returned to the United States in 1959, momentarily ending his acting career in Hong Kong cinema to concentrate on his studies.

In the United States, Lee had taught himself the martial arts. He was an innovator who invented his own technique of Jeet Kune Do (the art of the Intercepting Fist) which he modified from the Wing Chun tradition. Though he ruffled a few orthodox feathers, Lee secured a reputation as a champion in a martial arts competition, following which he expressed a desire to make it in the movies. He tried his luck in Hollywood, and landed minor roles in movies and television. Disillusioned, he returned to Hong Kong where he would show the world his mettle. His fame is essentially based on four films he made in Hong Kong: *Tangshan daxiong* (*The Big Boss*, 1971), *Jingwu men* (*Fist of Fury*, 1972), *Menglong guojiang* (*The Way of the Dragon*, 1972), and *Longzheng hudou* (*Enter the Dragon*, 1973).

Yet in Hong Kong, Lee was an outsider. Siu Leung Li points out that Lee's Chinese national identity was 'undercut and exposed by his own already multi-hyphenated and slippery identity' as an American citizen and Hong Kong-Chinese background.[59] Though his Cantonese roots meant that his martial arts stemmed from the southern tradition, he was essentially an autodidact who did not come out of the stage or the tradition of the Dragon-Tiger Masters. Li also asserts that Lee's Jeet Kune Do was a highly syncretic form of martial arts which 'synthesizes any skill functional and effective, regardless of cultural, national, sectarian boundaries.' As such, Lee's own school of martial arts is 'apparently not authentically "Chinese"'.[60] Based on such assertions, it may be said therefore that Lee broke the mould of the kung fu cinema shaped and fashioned by the Wong Fei-hung films.

The appeal of the Wong Fei-hung films was based on regionalism and local flavour. Lee's significance as a martial arts icon has relied on his charismatic ability to cross over from East to West. However, mutual understanding of Lee

remains elusive, symbolised by the apparent division in how Western and Eastern critics regard Lee in terms of the concepts of narcissism and nationalism. These two concepts were raised by Tony Rayns in a short but often-quoted essay on Bruce Lee published in 1980.[61] By raising the psychoanalytical trope of narcissism, Rayns attributes the star's interest and training in the martial arts to his sense of inferiority. Rayns probably meant to pose narcissism as a counterintuitive response to nationalism, which to most critics implies racialism and ethnicity, or the kind of 'ghetto myth' politics representing the essentialism of the genre that, one assumes, Western critics find most objectionable.[62] Peggy Chiao explains that Lee's films are 'overtly political' but because the politics are presented in 'black and white', they are 'devoid of persuasive power' and 'Lee's blatant racism and nationalism thus spell one of the major weaknesses of his films'.[63]

However, far from attenuating Lee's nationalism, its matching with narcissism raises intriguing suggestions that they are two sides of the same coin. Lee is like a male version of Thirteenth Sister who represents the two sides of the knight-errant (a traditionalist conservative side and a revolutionary activist side). His mastery of kung fu is that side that links him with nationalism (kung fu and nationalism are inextricably linked, as the name *guoshu* reminds us), but his narcissistic side indicates a more problematic personality, pointing to a clash between traditional norms of knight-errant behaviour (albeit manifested through a bumpkin persona as seen in *The Big Boss* and *The Way of the Dragon*) and the standards of postmodernism (Lee heralding kung fu as a postmodern martial art).[64] Rayns throws no light at all on the subject and has nothing to say about how Lee might be seen as a contemporary version of a traditional knight-errant. He does throw *some* light on Lee's body by associating it with narcissism, but makes no connection between the body and nationalism: Yvonne Tasker has proven more erudite on this matter when she says that the 'assertion of nationalism is very clearly inscribed through the revelation of Lee's body'.[65]

As for narcissism and Lee's body, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar have pointed out that Rayns's article offers a 'queer appreciation of Lee',[66] but in the same way that the article is unable to offer an objective and perceptive analysis of Lee's nationalism, it is also inadequate in assessing Lee's narcissism as queer viewing pleasure. Berry and Farquhar are of course more perceptive on this subject. Defining Lee as a paragon of 'neo-*wu* masculinity', the authors emphasise that his brand of masculinity 'is hybridized with and positioned within globalized American (codes of) masculinity'.[67] Berry and Farquhar are troubled by the narcissistic eroticisation of Lee under the 'queer gaze' of one of the characters in Lee's films (the actor Wei Ping'ao who appears as a gay villain in *Fist of Fury* and *The Way of the Dragon*) which reveals homophobia and attendant anxieties as 'an integral component of the globalized American masculinity that features display of the eroticized as well as martial male body'.[68] 'The ultimate

goal of this model of masculinity,' they continue, 'is to win the approving acknowledgement of other men. This homosocial aim can also tip all too easily into homosexuality if respect and admiration become the foundation for desire, and therefore the boundary line between the two must be rigorously policed'.[69]

Here the question to consider is who or what does the policing? Berry and Farquhar suggest that the tensions are worked out in martial arts action, but just what exactly is the driving force of martial arts action? Neo-*wu* masculinity? Could not the constituent of Chinese nationalism in Lee's masculinity act as the policing factor that stops masculinity from tipping over into homosexuality? There is some irony here because it is through kung fu that Lee respects and admires the transnational Other in homosocial fashion, as shown in his duel with Chuck Norris in the Coliseum scene in *The Way of the Dragon*. This scene demonstrates that nationalism and narcissism appear to complement each other or perhaps to contain each other (in any case, each throws some light on the other), but thus far, what really is the nature of Lee's nationalism? Here I might just bring up the question that Yuan Shu asks, 'What kind of nationalism could Lee's films offer to the inhabitants of Hong Kong?' His reply echoes my point about abstract nationalism:

> Lee's rendition of China highlights the problem of cultural dislocation among the inhabitants of Hong Kong, who do not identify themselves with either mainland China or the British empire, but who live in a space of anxiety, ambiguity, and contradiction in between.

He goes on to say that such a sense of uncertainty can easily be turned 'into anticolonial sentiments' and that this representation of China 'is exactly how nationalism works in Lee's films'.[70] My own essays had attempted to demonstrate this but may instead have overemphasised the Chineseness factor in Lee's nationalism, not giving due concern to his transnational appeal.[71]

Lee's 'nationalism' is multi-faceted and revolves around issues of decolonisation struggles,[72] postcolonial or subaltern identity, ethnic pride, civil rights activism, appealing not only to Chinese communities, as his primary audience, but also other minority communities in the West, as Vijay Prashad has demonstrated in his book, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*.[73] Whether or not the politics are persuasive is immaterial it seems to me, and Prashad has shown that the star's philosophy of fighting with one's bare hands inspired a generation of African-Americans and Asian-Americans to take up the martial arts in order to bolster the anti-racist movement in the United States.[74] This is the kind of progressive nationalism, iconically represented by Bruce Lee, which now seems forgotten in the age of globalisation,[75] perhaps in the interest of the contemporary neoliberal orthodoxy which serves to remind us that nationalism was never progressive at all.

Lee's nationalism however would amount to nothing if not for the fact that he was responsible for revivifying kung fu as a genre in the Hong Kong cinema. This is of course significant; if Lee had made his first kung fu movie in the United States, we might not now be talking of nationalism but transnationalism, to begin with. Though it is critically fashionable to attribute the rise of the kung fu cinema to Bruce Lee, the reason for the rise was not due solely to Lee. Shaw Brothers had rush-produced the first kung fu pictures well before Lee arrived on the Hong Kong scene: Zhang Che's *Baochou* (*Vengeance*) and Jimmy Wang Yu's *Longhu dou* (*The Chinese Boxer*), both released in 1970 posted first claims on the genre before rival Golden Harvest could do so with the first Bruce Lee picture. Shaw Brothers and Golden Harvest were engaged in a fierce rivalry, and they manufactured a push into the European and US markets with a spate of kung fu movies, dubbed into English and given new titles from their Hong Kong versions, among them Shaws' *Tianxia diyi quan* (*Five Fingers of Death*, originally *King Boxer*), and Golden Harvest's *The Big Boss* (renamed *Fists of Fury* in the US).[76] They were sensational box-office hits, the first time that Hong Kong movies had scored in a big way in the Western market. *The Big Boss* was Bruce Lee's first kung fu movie upon his return to Hong Kong and he became an instant phenomenon. The film played in sixteen theatres located all over Hong Kong, seven performances each day, finally grossing over HK$4 million, a record-breaking achievement for a Hong Kong star.[77]

Smarting on its failure to secure Lee's services when he first approached them, it was now Shaw Brothers who approached the star, in 1973. Lee demanded HK$2.5 million (about half a million US dollars at the then rate of exchange), and Run Run Shaw was hard put to turn him down.[78] Lee, however, was toying with the idea of becoming a truly independent movie star, working with both major studios and with other independents. He was half-way succeeding with this game plan when he died prematurely. He had established his own company, Concord, and went on to direct and star in *The Way of the Dragon*. That success then led Lee to re-stake his claim on Hollywood, by appearing in *Enter the Dragon*, a co-production with Warner Brothers. This was an important film in laying the groundwork of East–West appreciation of the genre, signalling the kind of denationalised, if not completely deracinated, kung fu project that Hollywood would aim to produce in the years ahead.[79]

While Hong Kong's studios had economic reasons to manufacture the kung fu craze, it must be said that the genre's appeal would not have had as great an impact without Bruce Lee. Lee's appeal was founded on his charisma and innovative style in the martial arts, and it is here that we might consider his kung fu a postmodern syncretisation of tradition and personal idiosyncrasy. It is worthwhile to look at this style in some detail. I will focus on the last climactic sequence of *The Big Boss*. The film's Bangkok setting immediately breaks the precedents of the Wong Fei-hung films. Lee plays a Chinese migrant who finds

work in an ice factory. When his buddies go missing, Lee investigates but is instead made the foreman of the factory so as to forestall any discoveries of foul play. Eventually, Lee discovers that the ice factory is used as a front for drug trafficking by the boss, played by Han Yingjie. In the final confrontation scene, the two men fight each other, with Han employing his skills as a northern master of martial arts, and Lee his own innovative style of kung fu modified from Wing Chun techniques. Unlike the operatic style of the Wong Fei-hung films, Lee's style was more akin to something that one could see in a tournament with two people competing and exchanging blows.[80] The action is more brutal and much quicker, more like a real street fight and less like an opera.

Lee was primarily responsible for his own choreography of the martial arts scenes, working on these with the credited martial arts director Han Yingjie. He incorporated the expansive, exaggerated style of choreography in the new school *wuxia* cycle preceding the rise of the kung fu movie, realising that audiences would be used to watching this form of choreographic violence. Lee employed his famous leaps-into-the-air stunts, achieved by the trampoline. His strategy was to heighten the reality of the kung fu techniques in an offsetting effect combining the convention of *wuxia* pictures. Thus, he maintained some of what the audience expected to see from *wuxia* pictures (the flying, leaping and jumping) but presented something else they had never seen before – an intense, animalistic fight sequence of two men using real kicks and real punches. In other words, the 'real fighting' of kung fu had to undergo a cinematic change.

Real kung fu fighting lasts only a brief few seconds, as martial arts coaches will testify, and although Lee was a Wing Chun practitioner of very high standard, he understood that realistic Wing Chun methods were not compatible with cinema. The technique is too short and too abrupt. It is said that Wing Chun was created to take advantage of the tight, narrow streets and alleyways of Guangzhou where the martial art originated (the last set-piece scene in Lau Kar-leong's *Martial Club* demonstrates this kind of fighting within narrow confines splendidly, though in Lau's film, the style on display is the more muscular 'Hong fist'[81]). On film, the technique would look too fast and too quick but in order to make it look convincing, Lee exaggerated all his motions. In *The Big Boss*, all the action happens in short sequences emphasising one type of kung fu technique or another.

The interplay with real technique and cinematic effect would characterise all kung fu pictures after Bruce Lee, who essentially pioneered the concept (thus, the idea of 'real kung fu' is a matter of combining body and cinematic techniques). The climactic fight sequence between Lee and Han Yingjie in *The Big Boss* was a very influential setpiece that obviously prompted young director John Woo to come up with his own variation of the one-on-one combat sequence. When Woo was given a chance to direct his very first picture in 1972, he chose to make a kung fu movie, which was eventually released as *Tiehan*

rouqing (*The Young Dragons*) in 1975 by the Golden Harvest Studio. Woo staged a protracted climactic duel in which hero and villain fight it out to the death employing lots of kicks and fist work in the same manner as Bruce Lee and Han Yingjie.

What prevented Woo's sequence from being a complete reprise of the climax in *The Big Boss* was his camera eye. Woo engendered cinematic style with a minimum of special effects. The camera changes positions constantly. The combatants engage each other in a series of cuts (a grab, a throw, a fall) all working from different angles but seen as a whole sequence almost unbroken.[82] Woo's brilliance with the camera and his skills in editing challenges the notion of 'real kung fu'. Woo's work constitutes an evolutionary shift in the development of the martial arts genre in the Hong Kong cinema. From the Wong Fei-hung films onwards, stars and performers were key to the concept of real fighting, but in Woo's case, the director has gained more control of the process.

By virtue of his style in the action choreography achieved mainly through editing, Woo debunks the idea of 'real kung fu'. King Hu, famous for his new school *wuxia* pictures, always took delight in saying that there was no such thing as kung fu. 'Kung fu is like Fu Manchu, it doesn't exist anywhere except maybe in San Francisco's Chinatown', he said.[83] 'Kung fu' was a purely Cantonese term that imparted no meaning of the martial arts in Mandarin; but Hu might have explained that there was no such thing as real kung fu fighting in cinema. However, the claim of real kung fu was like a declaration of truth among stars and directors working in the genre and even Hu himself seemed to believe it. Hu took pains to differentiate between his style of cinematic combat with the style of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and others, which he called 'real fighting.' 'What I describe is not real fighting', Hu said.[84] Hu called his fighting dance.

From the 'swordplay and magic' strand of the *shenguai wuxia* genre to the 'real fighting' strand of the kung fu genre, we may begin to discern the evolution of a third cinematic strand of the martial arts genre stressing the plasticity of film and the exhilaration of montage. I have referred to John Woo's debut work *The Young Dragons*, as a good indication of this third strand. Woo's work in this period of the Hong Kong cinema showed influences from King Hu and Zhang Che, just as he was also influenced by Bruce Lee and Han Yingjie in *The Big Boss*. In effect, he was distilling the essence of both *wuxia* and kung fu, and though he would earn his fame with contemporary gangster movies such as *Yingxiong bense* (*A Better Tomorrow*, 1986) and *Diexie shuangxiong* (*The Killer*, 1989), the source of his cinematic style of action can be traced to the martial arts.

When Woo joined the film industry, the kung fu picture was at the height of its popularity and all the world was into kung fu fighting. By the time *The Young Dragons* was actually released in 1975, the kung fu craze had just about faded in the West. The fad came and went but what remains are the images. In

the final analysis, it is the cinematic brilliance of directors such as Woo, King Hu, Zhang Che, Lau Kar-leong, and not so much the 'real kung fu' itself, that hypostatise the martial arts.

Conclusion

The kung fu cinema shattered the uniformity of the history of the Chinese martial arts cinema, as begun through an adherence to *wuxia* and the traditions of Wudang. This chapter ends with Bruce Lee as the most famous beneficiary of the Southern Shaolin kung fu tradition in the Hong Kong cinema instituted by the character of Wong Fei-hung (Lee of course was also a builder of that tradition). I have deliberately broken the continuity in the chronology of this history of the *wuxia* film in order to suggest a less than smooth development of the martial arts cinema, since, following the ascent of Bruce Lee, the world would recognise a different kind of martial arts cinema in the form of the kung fu film.

In the next chapter, I will revert back to the 1950s to detail the rise of the new school *wuxia* picture. Though both *wuxia* and kung fu draw on mutual influences, the evolution and rise of the kung fu cinema in the 1970s, as signalled by the incredible drawing power of Bruce Lee, will displace the new school *wuxia* genre illustrating further the rupture and discontinuity of its history. The bifurcated development of *wuxia* and kung fu is more an intertextual transposition from one form to the other, not a historical break from each other. Henceforth the element of *wuxia* chivalry is an acknowledged component of kung fu and the element of 'real fighting' techniques in hand and leg combat are an integral part of *wuxia* action, embellished by the characteristics of swordfighting and fantasy.

Notes

1. Wu Pang (Hu Peng), *Wo yu Huang Feihong* ('Wong Fei-hung and I') (Hong Kong: Wu Pang, 1995), p. 5.
2. Ibid., p. 4.
3. Ibid., p. 5.
4. See Ye Hongsheng, *Lun jian*, p. 47.
5. See John Christopher Hamm, 'Local Heroes: Guangdong School *Wuxia* Fiction and Hong Kong's Imagining of China', *Twentieth-Century China*, 27:1, November 2001, 71–96, esp. p. 73. Some of the material of this article is incorporated into chapter 2, about Guangdong school fiction, in Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen*, pp. 32–48.
6. Readers may refer to entries in *Hong Kong Filmography, Volume 1, 1913–1941* (Hong Kong Film Archive, 1997), pp. 290 and 306.
7. See Tony Williams, 'Under "Western Eyes": The Personal Odyssey of Huang Fei-Hong in *Once Upon a Time in China*', *Cinema Journal*, 40:1, Fall 2000, pp. 3–24.
8. The titles of the episodes are *Wong Fei-hung Snuffs the Candle Flame with Whiplash* (Part One) and *Wong Fei-hung Burns the Tyrant's Lair* (Part Two).
9. Wu Pang, *Wo yu Huang Feihong*, p. 6.

10. Ibid., pp. 166–167.
11. See Hector Rodriguez, 'Hong Kong Popular Culture as an Interpretive Arena: The Huang Feihong Film Series', *Screen*, 38:1, Spring 1997, 1–24, esp. p. 9.
12. Ibid., p. 9.
13. On the staff as one of the staple weapons in Shaolin fighting techniques, see Meir Shahar, 'Staff Legends', in *The Shaolin Monastery*, pp. 82–109.
14. Zhu Yuzhai, *Huang Feihong biezhuan* ('A Supplementary Biography of Wong Fei-hung') (Hong Kong: Perlan Book Co., no year specified), p. 1. Zhu's biography was published in instalments in Hong Kong's *Commercial Daily News* in the 1940s. See also Bey Logan's *Hong Kong Action Cinema* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1995), p. 10.
15. Zhu Yuzhai, *Huang Feihong biezhuan*, p. 5.
16. See Ye Hongsheng, *Lun jian*, p. 48.
17. This data is obtained from a filmography printed in the Hong Kong Film Archive's publication *Wong Fei-hung, The Invincible Master*, a brochure accompanying a Wong Fei-hung retrospective in 1996. Kwan Tak-hing himself claimed to have made ninety-nine Wong Fei-hung films.
18. Tony Williams, 'Under "Western Eyes"', p. 22.
19. See Jeff Takacs, 'A Case of Contagious Legitimacy: Kinship, Ritual and Manipulation in Chinese Martial Arts Societies', *Modern Asian Studies*, 37:4, 2003, 885–917, esp. p. 893.
20. John Christopher Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen*, p. 8.
21. For an analysis of the nationalist project in Tsui's Wong Fei-hung films, see chapter on Tsui Hark in my *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), pp. 171–173.
22. For more on the prologue scene, see Tony Williams, 'Under "Western Eyes"', pp. 9–10.
23. See chapter, 'Bruce Lee: Narcissus and the Little Dragon', in my *Hong Kong Cinema*, p. 112.
24. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991, revised edition), p. 6.
25. Anderson refers to the history of Chinese overseas migration over the period of the disintegration of the Qing dynasty as the basis of the spread of the 'imagined community' relating to the Chinese. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 190.
26. Siu Leung Li, 'Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity', p. 516.
27. Ibid., p. 518.
28. Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, p. 8.
29. In the sense that Wong Fei-hung is both a Cantonese nationalist and a Chinese nationalist, I disagree with Kwai-Cheung Lo's assertion that the early Wong Fei-hung films impart the message that 'the local community under Wong, the father figure par excellence, will exhaust every means in order to enable the ethnically homogeneous, the nationally continuous, and the traditionally virtuous to prevail over the heterogeneous, the alien, and the newfangled'. This is a misreading of the films' localism as well as the concept of nationalism as represented by Kwan's Wong Fei-hung character. The Wong Fei-hung persona is that of a Confucian moderate Republican, not a rebellious outlaw of the marshland. Wong is always seen as a mediator, striving to unite the fractious community into a greater entity. It would be against the grain of his character to exhort the local community to 'exhaust every means' to do what Lo claims in his statement. See Lo, *Chinese Face/Off: The Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p. 149.
30. Hector Rodriguez, 'Hong Kong Popular Culture as an Interpretive Arena', p. 8.

31. I have borrowed this line from William Holland who asserted that the Confucian philosophy 'was cosmopolitan, not nationalistic, in its world outlook'. See Holland, 'Introduction: New Trends in Asian Nationalism', in Holland (ed.), *Asian Nationalism and the West* (New York: Octagon, 1973), 3–64, esp. p. 40.
32. See Y. W. Ma, 'The Knight-Errant in *Hua-pen* Stories', p. 282.
33. Kwan said this in a 1989 talk show programme for HK-TVB.
34. For a discussion of the different screen representations of the Wong Fei-hung character as portrayed by Kwan Tak-hing and Jet Li, see Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, p. 170. See also Ng Ho, 'The Three Heroic Transformations of Huang Feihong', *Wong Fei-hung, The Invincible Master* (Hong Kong Film Archive, 1996).
35. See Tony Williams, 'Under "Western Eyes"', p. 16.
36. See Kwai-Cheung Lo, '*Once Upon a Time*: Technology Comes to Presence in China,' *Modern Chinese Literature*, Vol. 7, 1993, 79–96, esp. p. 81.
37. See Kwai-Cheung Lo, *Chinese Face/Off*, p. 153.
38. C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel*, p. 88.
39. Kwai-Cheung Lo, '*Once Upon a Time*', p. 82.
40. See Aaron Anderson, 'Violent Dances in Martial Arts Films', *Jump Cut*, No. 44, Fall 2001.
41. Leon Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters*, p. 29.
42. Ibid., p. 39.
43. Richard Allen, 'Representation, Illusion, and the Cinema', *Cinema Journal*, 32:2, Winter 1993, 21–48, p. 42.
44. Ibid. p. 43.
45. Here one must bear in mind that the claim of 'reality' is not unrelated to the general thrust of the Guangdong school of *wuxia* fiction, which, as John Christopher Hamm observes, is a genre 'rather different from that of "real" *wuxia* fiction' as represented by the new school, in that its protagonists 'seem to fight with fists more than with swords; its narrative elements tend towards blood feuds, to the exclusion of such New School standbys as romance or the quest for occult martial secrets; its general "mimetic level" seems earthier, a step or two below the New School's epic vision'. See Hamm, 'Local Heroes', p. 87.
46. See Liu Damu, 'Chinese Myth and Martial Arts Films: Some Initial Approaches', in Lin Nien-tung (ed.), *Hong Kong Cinema Survey 1946–1968*, 40–48, esp. pp. 40–41.
47. Kwai-Cheung Lo, '*Once Upon a Time*', p. 93.
48. Ibid., p. 93.
49. Ibid., p. 93.
50. See Wu Pang, *Wo yu Huang Feihong*, p. 21.
51. Liu Damu, 'Chinese Myth and Martial Arts Films', p. 41.
52. Conversation with Lau Kar-leong, 9 April 2001, Hong Kong. See also *The Making of Martial Arts Films as Told by Filmmakers and Stars* (Hong Kong Film Archive, 1999), p. 71.
53. Author's conversation with Lau, 9 April 2001.
54. A similar scene occurs in *The Skyhawk* (1974), Kwan Tak-hing's return to the series after an absence of four years, where a bad guy pours boiling water from a kettle over Wong Fei-hung's head, and Wong stoically bears the discomfort, refusing to retaliate with action.
55. See Jin Feng, 'Huang Feihong yangwei yiyu: Guan Dexing Taiguo paipian' ('Wong Fei-hung Flaunting Strength in Alien Territory: Kwan Tak-hing in Thailand Shoot') in *Jiahe dianying* ('Golden Movie News'), No. 19, October 1973, p. 43.
56. See A Q, 'Pai Huang Feihong de dongji: fang daoyan He Menghua' ('Interview with He Menghua: the Motive behind the making of Huang Feihong'), *Xianggang yinghua* ('Hong Kong Movie News'), No. 89, May 1973, p. 38.

57. Bey Logan, *Hong Kong Action Cinema*, p. 10.
58. Zhang Che, *Huigu Xianggang dianying sanshi nian* ('Memoirs: Thirty Years in Hong Kong Cinema') (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1989), p. 6.
59. Siu Leung Li, 'Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity', pp. 527–528. Li also quotes Kwai Cheung Lo's argument that Bruce Lee's diverse background puts him outside the category of 'Chinese hero', and that his 'Chineseness' invokes 'a distant and void China' (Li, p. 528), which is primarily my point of 'abstract nationalism'. Lo's argument is taken from his essay, 'Muscles and Subjectivity: A Short History of the Masculine Body in Hong Kong Popular Culture', *Camera Obscura*, Vol. 7, 1996, pp. 105–125.
60. Li, 'Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity', p. 527.
61. See Tony Rayns, 'Bruce Lee: Narcissism and Nationalism', in Lau Shing-hon (ed.), *A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film*, pp. 110–112. Rayns later expanded this essay into another article, 'Bruce Lee and Other Stories', in Li Cheuk-to (ed.), *A Study of Hong Kong Cinema in the Seventies*, 8 Hong Kong International Film Festival catalogue (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1984), pp. 26–29.
62. The term 'ghetto myth' comes from Stuart Kaminsky, 'Kung Fu Film as Ghetto Myth', in Michael T. Marsden and John G. Nachbar (ed.), *Movies as Artifacts: Cultural Critiques of Popular Film* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), pp. 137–145.
63. See Hsiung-ping Chiao, 'Bruce Lee: His Influence on the Evolution of the Kung Fu Genre', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 9:1, Spring 1981, 30–42, esp. p. 38.
64. The traditional knight-errant behaviour of Lee in *The Way of the Dragon* is seen in the scene where he runs away from a naked Italian woman who has picked him up and taken him back to his apartment, illustrating my point about *wuxia* celibacy. This behaviour is contrasted with the 'narcissistic' scene prior to the woman's appearance where Lee looks at himself in the mirror and practises martial arts moves, suggesting a connection between narcissism and the persistent need to innovate and practise martial arts. For an analysis of this scene, see Gary Needham, 'Encounters with the Dragon', in Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Needham (ed.), *Asian Cinemas: A Reader and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 409–413, esp. pp. 410–411. Lee's behaviour, according to Needham, underlines the contradictions and problems between the fixed, historicist image of the *wuxia*-cum-kung fu hero and concurrent modern/postmodern expectations of liberal society.
65. Yvonne Tasker, 'Fists of Fury: Discourses of Race and Masculinity in the Martial Arts Cinema', in Eleftheriotis and Needham (ed.), *Asian Cinemas: A Reader and Guide*, 437–456, esp. p. 440.
66. See Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), fn 19, p. 261. For a more thorough discussion on the queer appropriation of Lee, see Chris Berry, 'Stellar Transit: Bruce Lee's Body or Chinese Masculinity in a Transnational Frame', in Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich (ed.), *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation and Chinese Cultures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), pp. 218–234.
67. Berry and Farquhar, *China on Screen*, p. 202.
68. Ibid., p. 202.
69. Ibid., pp. 202–203.
70. See Yuan Shu, 'From Bruce Lee to Jackie Chan: Reading the Kung Fu Film in an American Context', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 31:2, Summer 2003, 50–59, esp. pp. 52–53.
71. See my essay 'True Way of the Dragon: The Films of Bruce Lee', in Law Kar (ed.), *Overseas Chinese Figures in Cinema*, 16th Hong Kong International Film Festival (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1992), pp. 70–80; and my chapter on Lee in *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, pp. 110–121.

72. See M. T. Kato, 'Burning Asia: Bruce Lee's Kinetic Narrative of Decolonization', *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 17:1, Spring 2005, 62–99, see in particular p. 89. Kato writes of a 'kung fu cultural revolution' which had 'great potential to relate to a broader spectrum of decolonization struggles, because it reflected the raw social sentiment of the Hong Kong masses under multiple layers of colonization'.
73. Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). See also Prashad, 'Bruce Lee and the Anti-Imperialism of Kung Fu: A Polycultural Adventure', *positions*, 11:1, Spring 2003, pp. 51–90.
74. For an analysis of the connection between kung fu and African-Americans in Jackie Chan's films, see Gina Marchetti, 'Jackie Chan and the Black Connection', in Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo (ed.), *Keyframes: Popular Culture and Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 137–158. Meaghan Morris in the same volume argues that 'Lee's modelling of an empowering cultural nationalism detached from any specific *political* state is exactly what makes him inspiring for the comparably abstract and culturalized ethnic "nationalisms" that flourish in the US and other densely multicultural Western nations'. See Morris, 'Learning from Bruce Lee: Pedagogy and Political Correctness in Martial Arts Cinema', *Keyframes*, 171–186, esp. p. 183. For a contextualisation of the American political scene at the time of Lee's 'nationalist' impact, see Yuan Shu, 'From Bruce Lee to Jackie Chan', p. 53.
75. See M. T. Kato, 'Burning Asia', for a contextualisation of Asian mass movements and Lee's 'kinetic' impact as a metaphorical struggle for decolonisation at the 'nascent stage of globalization' (p. 94).
76. See David Desser, 'The Kung Fu Craze', pp. 20–24.
77. See 'Bruce Lee Takes Hong Kong Boxoffice by Storm', *Yinhe huabao* ('Milky Way Pictorial'), No. 164, November 1971, pp. 24–25.
78. See 'Li Xiaolong zaoshou gongji!' ('Bruce Lee under Attack!'), *Yinse shijie* ('Cinemart'), No. 38, February 1973, p. 2. Director Chu Yuan acted as Shaws' intermediary in making the offer to Lee. Chu would have directed Lee in the Shaws production *Nian Gengyao*, set in the Qing dynasty (the title referring to the name of the hero to be played by Lee). The film was never made due to Lee's death in July that year. See also Liu Yafo, 'Li Xiaolong wei Shaoshi paixi neimu' ('The Inside Story of Bruce Lee's Picture Deal with Shaw Brothers'), in *Yinse shijie* ('Cinemart'), No. 38, February 1973, p. 23.
79. For an assessment of the film, see Leon Hunt, 'Han's Island Revisited: Enter the Dragon as Transnational Cult Film', reprinted in Eleftheriotis and Needham (ed.), *Asian Cinemas: A Reader and Guide*, pp. 426–436.
80. I am indebted to David Petersen, a Wing Chun coach in Melbourne, and freelance contributor to many martial arts magazines, for pointing this out to me. Conversation with Petersen, Melbourne, 7 August 1999.
81. For an assessment of this scene, see Leon Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters*, p. 33.
82. Again, I owe this insight to David Petersen.
83. Mary Blume, 'Kung Fu Has Come to Paris – but it Doesn't Mean a Thing', *Los Angles Times*, 16 December 1974.
84. See Koichi Yamada and Koyo Udagawa, *A Touch of King Hu*, translated into Chinese by Lai Ho and Ma Sung-chi (Hong Kong: Zhengwen she, 1998), p. 68.

4. THE RISE OF NEW SCHOOL *WUXIA*

As the Wong Fei-hung series reached the end of the 1950s, it inevitably wore itself out through repeated variations of a theme, and although it would continue to run on throughout the 1960s, audiences were beginning to tire of the series and they returned once again to the *wuxia* film seeing it as a refreshing and exciting if also familiar genre. The freshness of *wuxia* in this period emanated from the 'new school' (*xinpai*) fiction that had seized the popular imagination by way of the newspapers and its practice of serialisations of martial arts novels. This literary phenomenon began in the mid-1950s, and introduced new writers of *wuxia* fiction such as Jin Yong and Liang Yusheng to the public for the first time. The new school rejuvenated the genre and the popularity of their stories increased the circulations of the newspapers that serialised them.

Liang Yusheng, born in 1922, started writing in 1954 for the *New Evening Post* (*Xin wan bao*). Liang wrote his first 'serial' *Longhu dou jinghua* (*The Lion and Tiger Vie in the Capital*), apparently at the behest of his editors who wanted to take advantage of the great public interest in martial arts following a contest fought in Macau on 17 January 1954 between a master of the White Crane school and a Taiji master. This event received intensive coverage from the press, and is generally considered by historians to have been the catalyst of the 'new school' *wuxia* literature.[1] Jin Yong, pen name of Louis Cha (Zha Liangyou), born in 1924, wrote his first novel *Shujian enchou lu* (*Romance of Book and Sword*) for serialisation in the *New Evening Post* in 1955. He founded the Ming Pao newspaper in 1959, reportedly so that he could continue writing *wuxia* novels for serialisation.[2]

By the end of the 1950s, the Cantonese cinema had put out the first film versions of the new school novels, including Jin Yong's *Shediao yingxiong zhuan* (*The Legend of the Brave Archer*, aka *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*, 1958), and *Shujian enchou lu* (*Romance of Book and Sword*, 1960). The first film version of Liang Yusheng's novel *Baifa monü zhuan* (*The Story of the White Haired Demon Girl*, aka *The Bride with White Hair*) was released in 1959. In this chapter, I will discuss the rise of the new school *wuxia* cycle principally in the Mandarin cinema inasmuch as the new school *wuxia* film is often thought of as a Mandarin cinema movement. However, I will begin by looking at the Cantonese cinema's appropriation of new school literature. This verifies the role of the Cantonese cinema in launching the whole cycle in the late 1950s while the Mandarin cinema at this time was going through a phase of industrial reconsolidation and firming up its production capabilities.

The *Wuxia* Resurgence in the Cantonese Cinema

From 1961 to 1966, the Cantonese cinema's fresh cycle of *wuxia* films were based on recently published novels of the wave of 'new school' martial arts fiction, such as the adaptation of Jin Yong's *Yitian tulong ji* (*The Story of the Sword and Sabre*) released in two instalments in 1963, and Chan Lit-bun's adaptation of Jin Tong's *Bixie jinchai* (*The Golden Hairpin*), in four instalments, also released in 1963. The return to *wuxia* was largely free of the scorn that was attached to the genre when it first emerged in the postwar Cantonese cinema because of the achievements of the new school authors, primarily Jin Yong and Liang Yusheng, who had rejuvenated and re-legitimised the genre in the minds of the reading public.

The 1960s *wuxia* cycle began as the brainchild of the Hong Kong Film Company, founded by Luo Bin, a Shanghai newspaper man. He produced *Xian he shenzhen* (*The Secret Book*, aka *Mythical Crane, Magic Needle*), which became a huge hit on its release in 1961. Unfolding in three instalments, the script was based on a novel by Taiwanese new school author Jin Tong (also known as Wo Longsheng) originally published in thirty instalments in the *Hong Kong Daily News*, the parent company of the Hong Kong Film Company. Most of the company's subsequent films were adaptations of novels serialised in the *Hong Kong Daily News*. Thus, a feature of the new *wuxia* cycle was an association with the newsprint business and the practice of serialisation (the films themselves were serialised in that they were usually released in several instalments).

Cinematically, the new cycle reintroduced stock fantasy ingredients of the old school, repackaged with higher production values and 'modernised' special effects, as exemplified in another remake of *Huoshao Honglian si* (*The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*), released in two instalments in 1963. Greater emphasis

was put on spectacle. The Hong Kong Film Company, in particular, was willing to spare no expenses in producing entertainment for the masses. The company also reinvigorated the genre by cultivating fresh new talent to appear on screen. All these factors formed the superficial features of the 'new school' *wuxia* serial in the Cantonese cinema.

To give an idea of the flavour of the aesthetics and dramatic structures in the new Cantonese *wuxia* cycle, I will outline the essence of the generic factors, and since the output is prolific, I will focus on *Rulai shenzhang* ('Buddha's Palm'), released in five instalments from 1964–1965, as the epitomic work demonstrating the characteristics of the genre in the Cantonese cinema.

The *wuxia* serial conforms to the tradition of the Chinese serial novel where the narrative unravels in *zhanghui*, or 'linking chapters'. The episodic segments involve multiple characters crossing paths in the course of a labyrinthine narrative. Heroes forge alliances with other heroes. In cases where the genders of the heroes differ, romance usually blossoms but only after they first meet in a situation of conflict as it usually transpires that the heroes come from different schools of the martial arts. Vendettas and old scores flow from the rivalry between schools and it is the task of the young heroes to uphold the honour of their respective masters or schools. The theme of revenge is part of the plot fabric, and the execution and satisfaction of vengeance (*baochou*) underlines the growth of the hero or the heroine, leading to the final resolution where justice prevails, and law and order are restored in the fractious world of the martial arts. As episodes pile up, protagonists are ensnared in perilous cliffhangers.

One of the clichés of the *wuxia* serial is the use of ingenious machine-operated traps, including sliding panels, trapdoors, false bottoms, and secret passageways. These are generally indicated under the Chinese term of *jiguan*, and the term is as much part of the *wuxia* and kung fu cinema as all other conventions and characteristics. It is an integral bit of business in the production design of the *wuxia* serial. Another integral element, already indicated, is the use of visual effects. According to the standards of the technology of the period, visual effects took the form of animation techniques directly drawn onto the celluloid film to denote the projection of rays and waves of energy known as *qi* or inner energy. Photographic visual effects such as double exposures, composite printing, reverse motion, fast motion, superimpositions, were commonly employed as part of the repertoire of visual effects. Wires were used to denote flying swordsmen and flying weapon artefacts. Creatures and demons, part of the fantastic, were portrayed by actors putting on prefabricated animal suits with human-like features. All such special effects, combining direct animation techniques, photographic visual effects, wirework, and stunt work, were standard to the genre at the time.

Buddha's Palm is the representative work in the 1960s canon of Cantonese *shenguai wuxia* serials. Adapted from a novel by Shangguan Hong originally

serialised in *Ming Pao*, the story centres on the quest of its hero Lung Kim-fei (Tso Tat-wah) to master the powers of Buddha's Palm, which are revealed and acquired over nine stages. Episode 1 details the passage of Lung Kim-fei from a common flunkey with a scarred face to a handsome knight. He acquires the elementary powers of Buddha's Palm from his master, the 'Fire Cloud Spirit'. Episode 2 sees the hero caught in a death-trap, his salvation at the hands of the heroine Kau Yuk-wah (Yu So-chau), with whom he falls in love and elopes. However, the heroine's grandmother, the woman who had caused the downfall of Lung Kim-fei's master sixty years ago, stops the lovers. The master turns up to save the lovers and confronts his old enemy, using the power of Buddha's Palm to fend her off. Episode 3 depicts the hero Lung Kim-fei planning to settle down by marrying Kau Yuk-wah. On their wedding day, the grandmother is killed. Lung Kim-fei, Kau Yuk-wah, her sister and a young Daoist knight Luk Yu (Kwan Hoi-shan) set off to find the murderers, who turn out to be a trio of mystic monks possessing the powers of the 'three extreme palms' technique seeking to dominate the *wulin* (literally, 'martial arts forest' signifying the world of martial arts) by exterminating the practitioners of the Buddha's Palm technique. They kill Fire Cloud Spirit. Before he dies, Fire Cloud Spirit hides his secrets in six ancient vessels (*ding*).

Episode 4, ostensibly the concluding episode (it was titled 'The Grand Conclusion'), describes the efforts of the four heroes in stealing the vessels from the three mystics, enlisting the help of the mistress of the Tin-Heung sect. The mistress agrees to help on condition that the young heroes help restore the half of her face which is deformed (entailing a diversion in which the heroes must scurry off to far-flung locations to kill mythical beasts and acquire their tongues and eyes as the ingredients in a brew which, when imbibed, will make the lady's face whole again). Meanwhile, the three mystics are unable to learn the secrets of the ninth level of Buddha's Palm: a disloyal disciple steals two of the vessels (which are later recovered by the heroes). The Tin-Heung mistress leads the final battle against the mystics but is treacherously killed. At the eleventh hour, Lung Kim-fei finally learns the secrets of the ninth level of Buddha's Palm and, in an earth-shattering climax, eliminates the three mystics and all their followers.

Despite having reached a 'grand conclusion', a fifth episode was added later, which film scholar Lo Wai-luk has called a 'post-story'.[3] The chief villain, 'Iron Face' Luo (Sek Kin), seeks to settle scores with Lung Kim-fei because Fire Cloud Spirit had broken his leg sixty years ago. Luo has grafted a new leg, and using his supernatural powers, make the leg grow to a tremendous size which he would then use as a weapon to trample his opponents. The bulk of the film concerns the relationship between this old avenging fury and his disciple, a young woman known as Little Dragon (played by Josephine Siao). Little Dragon acquires a conscience that makes her dangerous to the old man. He therefore causes her to swallow a centipede in the form of a pill. Each time Little Dragon

disobeys him, the old man beats a drum, activating the centipede that wriggles in the pit of her stomach and causes pain. Lung Kim-fei, using his ninth level Buddha's Palm power, ejects the centipede and breaks the spell. Little Dragon delivers the final come-uppance to her master, a subversive touch in a genre that has long emphasised loyalty and filial piety. The special effects were a cut above the usual, involving the building and deployment of a giant leg (which tramples on the hero in one scene), and wires to create the sensation of weightless leaps. More unusual was the use of slow motion and negative film to signify the force and perversity of Luo's powers as he confronts Lung Kim-fei.

To Lo Wai-luk, who has written the most extensive analysis of the series, *Buddha's Palm* is the most distinctive example of the fantasy form because unlike most *wuxia* novels, 'it has no seasons, no nationality, and no concrete history'.[4] In other words, *Buddha's Palm* is a work of abstract culturalism – a representation of a vague historical China which satisfies the audience's recognition of certain homogenising codifications in the world of *shenguai wuxia*, including the *jianghu*, the contrasting themes of obligation and revenge which determine the growth of the hero, and Buddhist ideas of transmigration, transcendence and enlightenment. The rays of energy that emanate from Buddha's palm are meant to dissolve conflict, not to kill; and the hero's mastery of Buddha's palm is reliant on the growth of his character.

Lo defends the genre's tendency towards artifice and abstraction even if it depicts a past with no real historicity and no real contemporaneity. He asserts that the impressionistic special effects of *shenguai wuxia* movies 'play on our imagination',[5] and have a more lasting impact. The charm of the *wuxia* serials of the 1960s lies in their childish simplicity. They are conceptual fantasy worlds, abstract works of art that are to be enjoyed as naïve fairy tales with its own internal logic of reality. Over the years since its dates of original release, the series have inspired a cult that has grown around constant revivals on late-night television. This kind of cult recognition is a belated, retrospective acknowledgement of the distinctiveness of the Cantonese *shenguai wuxia* film and its serial-adventure format. It underlines the Cantonese cinema's contribution to the genre, which is that the fantastic ingredients were basic to its culture and formalistically transhistorical, somehow reflecting the Cantonese identity of Hong Kong and its existence on the margin of China. Though it was also reviled by critics, the Cantonese *shenguai wuxia* film as exemplified by *Buddha's Palm* marked it out as different from the Mandarin *wuxia* film as it developed along the line of 'realistic violence', as I will show below.

The Impact of the Mandarin Cinema's *Wuxia* Resurgence

In 1965, the Shaw Brothers Studio announced the launching of a new 'action era' of new school *wuxia* movies. That Shaw Brothers would take the lead in

this new movement is not an accident. After all, it had historical precedence on its side. The studio's earliest predecessor, Tianyi (Unique), had pioneered the genre in the 1920s in Shanghai. Shaw Brothers invoked historical precedents when it explained in its in-house magazine *Southern Screen* what its objectives were in spearheading the new school *wuxia* movement:

> *Wuxia* stories have circulated in China for a thousand years, from the *chuanqi* of the Tang dynasty to *The Water Margin*. Master works have not been lacking through the ages but in the cinema, *wuxia* films are still awaiting the arrival of a masterpiece. The genre has long been limited by stage techniques of the 'northern school', which miss the mark because of artifice and staginess. Or else, the films are inclined towards *shenguai* fantasy, too far detached from reality. Modern audiences demand real 'action'. With this aim, Shaw Brothers will launch a movement to create a new-style *wuxia* movie.[6]

Describing its new venture as a 'progressive movement' which breaks with the 'conventional "stagy" shooting methods and introduces new techniques to attain a higher level of realism, particularly in the fighting sequences',[7] the new school *wuxia* would no longer rely on the Dragon-Tiger masters, or at least on their style of combat, and would replace their theatrical and 'symbolic mode' of fighting (dependent on somersaults, acrobatics and theatrical gestures) with 'real swords and spears and the "clang-clang" of action'.[8]

Shaws started production on a spate of *wuxia* movies in 1965, including Zhang Che's *Huxia jianchou* (*Tiger Boy*), *Biancheng sanxia* (*The Magnificent Trio*) and Xu Zenghong's trilogy *Jianghu qixia* (*Temple of the Red Lotus*), *Yuanyang jianxia* (*The Twin Swords*) and *Chouen jianqin* (*The Sword and the Lute*). It did not officially called these *wuxia* movies 'new school' but rather coined its own slogan, *wuxia xin shiji* ('new *wuxia* century'), a somewhat clumsy designation to denote the new school. The slogan was invented perhaps because many of the Shaw Brothers films were in fact conscious remakes and reworkings of old school novels. *Temple of the Red Lotus*, *The Twin Swords* and *The Sword and the Lute* were based on Pingjiang Buxiaosheng's novel *Jianghu qixia zhuan* (*Legend of the Strange Swordsmen*) which inspired the Shanghai cinema's *Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* series in the late 1920s. Xu Zenghong's *Qixia wuyi* (*King Cat*, 1967) was of course based on the popular late nineteenth-century novel *Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* which consolidated the rise of *xiayi* fiction sparked off by an earlier version of the novel *Sanxia wuyi* (*Three Heroes and Five Gallants*).

But although Shaws was the first studio to launch the new school *wuxia* genre, it was the left-wing Great Wall Studio which actually introduced a film based on a novel by a new school writer: Liang Yusheng's *Yunhai yugong yuan* (*The Jade*

Bow), released in 1966, and directed by Zhang Xinyan. The most notable feature of *The Jade Bow* was a new line in swordfights that could have been lifted from Shaws' maxim of a 'higher level of realism'. The person responsible for the 'realistic' swordfighting choreography of *The Jade Bow* was Lau Kar-leong who had worked in the Wong Fei-hung films as a stuntman, stunt coordinator and bit actor. He joined Shaw Brothers as a martial arts director and was instrumental, along with director Zhang Che, in defining the new school *wuxia* film.

The rise of the Mandarin cinema's new school *wuxia* pictures with its emphasis on realistic violence took the steam out of the Cantonese cinema's own *wuxia* expansion which had begun earlier. The Cantonese *wuxia* film was thought to focus more on fantasy and special effects, and 'realistic violence' was the antidote to fantasy. The Wong Fei-hung films, it should be recalled, offered 'real kung fu'. In fact, the fantastic remained a basic premise of the genre even in the Mandarin cinema. Particularly telling was the oft-used motif of protagonists leaping weightlessly up to the roofs and walls, an effect achieved simply by reversing the shots of the actors jumping down. However, the Cantonese cinema adopted the Mandarin *wuxia* style and keenly absorbed its influence as a strategy to keep itself relevant and vibrant as it fell into decline. To this extent, the new school *wuxia* film was a real 'movement' that pervaded the whole Hong Kong film industry.

Illustrative examples of Cantonese new school *wuxia* movies inspired by the Mandarin variants are the films of director Chan Lit-bun: *Biyan monü* (*The Green-Eyed Demoness*, 1967), *Tianjian juedao* (*Paragon of Sword and Knife*, 1967, in two instalments), and *Dubei shenni* (*The One-Armed Magic Nun*, 1969), all featuring the new starlet Sidney Hung (or Suet Nei, in Cantonese), a female knight-errant with a difference inasmuch as she remains a more rebellious, unruly, and finally, pathological figure without reverting back to the obedient, compliant feminine side of the Thirteenth Sister prototype. Sidney Hung's representative characterisation is the eponymous role of *The Green-Eyed Demoness*, shot in black and white. The film stands out as a marvellously atmospheric Gothic *wuxia* piece laced with humour (a modulation of the fantastic *shenguai* standard), and it contains some of the most innovative action set pieces seen in the Hong Kong cinema at the time. Similarly, the atmospherics and weird array of characters in *The One-Armed Magic Nun* and *Xiao moxia* (*The Devil Warrior*, 1969) prefigured the latter 'new wave' re-castings of the genre in Chu Yuan's *Tianya mingyue dao* (*The Magic Blade*, 1976) and Tsui Hark's *Die bian* (*The Butterfly Murders*, 1979).

Chan Lit-bun's *wuxia* films proved that Cantonese directors could match the technical sophistication and production values of the Mandarin cinema. Spurred on by the Mandarin *wuxia* resurgence, the Cantonese cinema moved to modernise itself. It adopted colour and the scope aspect ratio as the standard for all its productions; it also adopted the realistic style of combat that transcended the

stage-like effects of its *wuxia* serials. It imitated the performing prototypes of Mandarin cinema, such as female knights-errant and mendicant drunkard knights from King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* (1966), one-armed swordspersons from Zhang Che's *Dubei dao* (*The One-Armed Swordsman*, 1967), and even blind swordsmen from the Japanese Zatoichi series, in films like Wong Fung's *Feixia xiao bailong* (*The White Dragon*, 1968), Ling Wan's *Jianghu diyi jian* (*The Supreme Sword*, 1969), Lee Tit's *Xiao wushi* (*The Little Warrior*, 1969).

The technical standards and style of the *wuxia* film in both Mandarin and Cantonese cinemas would converge towards the end of the 1960s. Aesthetically, there appeared to be no difference between the two cinemas, from the viewpoint of the *wuxia* genre. In that sense, the *wuxia* genre, both in its aspects of *wu* violence and *xia* chivalry, acted as a homogenising force in the Hong Kong cinema, functioning as a historicist, cultural-essentialist genre that cuts through the fragmented Chinese-language divisions of the film industry in Hong Kong.

The rest of this chapter covers the period of the ascendancy of Mandarin *wuxia* cinema from the second half of the 1960s onwards. It will examine how the new school *wuxia* film features as the key genre behind the financial well-being of the two main players in Hong Kong's Mandarin film industry, the Shaw Brothers Studio and the Cathay Studio. The Mandarin cinema became the dominant industry as Cantonese movies slowly disappeared from the movie screens. However, the rivalry between the two major Mandarin studios from 1965 to 1971 resulted in the virtual monopoly of Shaw Brothers and the eventual decline of the Cathay studio. This coincided with the resurgence and decline of the *wuxia* genre itself, a historical coincidence that had a definite bearing on the respective studios' attempts to reverse either its decline (in the case of Cathay) or to strengthen its competitive advantage (in the case of Shaw Brothers).

Zhang Che's Macho Self-fashioning

The Shaw Brothers' new school *wuxia* project began in 1965, when the studio assigned Zhang Che to direct *Tiger Boy*. Zhang directed his first film in 1949, making the first Mandarin movie in Taiwan, but then withdrew into scriptwriting after relocating to Hong Kong where he also functioned as a film critic (writing under the pseudonym of He Guan). Joining Shaw Brothers as a script supervisor and writer in 1962, the studio entrusted him with the task of directing *Tiger Boy*, one of the early new school *wuxia* projects, released in 1966, and with supervising other *wuxia* films directed by others. Zhang hit the big time with *The One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) which grossed over HK$1,000,000, a new record in the box-office at the time. While there have been other directors in the Shaw Brothers stable working in the same *wuxia* genre who were commercially more successful, such as Luo Wei who matched and surpassed Zhang's tag of the 'million dollar director', no other director working contemporaneously with

Zhang has quite matched his style and obsession. He remains Shaws' most representative director of new school *wuxia* pictures.

The title of this section refers to Zhang Che as a self-fashioning artist. I have appropriated the concept of self-fashioning from Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. According to Greenblatt, the Renaissance writers self-consciously fashion their personal identities as a 'manipulable, artful process' in and through their works.[9] I apply this concept to both Zhang Che (1923–2002) and King Hu (1932–1997), the two most recognised figures of the new school, implying that both directors possessed the kinds of egos and talents that could allow self-fashioning to take place. Self-fashioning is used here in preference over auteurism though it does not necessarily preclude it (indeed, it might even imply or entail a degree of auteurist authorship) so as to allude to a specific role in the director's job of constructing (or reconstructing) a subject identity in the cinematic new school *wuxia* genre. Self-fashioning therefore highlights the identity of the knight-errant figure (*xia*), both masculine and feminine, and the rigorous and obsessive manner in which the directors fashion the character and the body of this figure in the cinema.

I therefore hold that the one defining measure of self-fashioning in the *wuxia* films of King Hu and Zhang Che is the portrayal of gender prototypes of *xia*. Hu remoulded the feminine *wuxia* prototype from the historicist tradition of the female knight-errant which he based on Pu Songling's short story *Xianü* (a title indicating a chivalrous female knight-errant). Zhang remoulded the male prototype of *xia* based on the romantic scholar-knight model. One such model was that of Wen Suchen from Xia Jingqu's novel, *Yesou puyan* (*The Humble Words of an Old Rustic*), written in the eighteenth century but only becoming widely known in the 1880s. Never entirely eschewing romanticism, Zhang emphasised robust qualities of manhood which he coined into a slogan of the new school *wuxia* cinema, *yang gang*, meaning staunch masculinity. In this, Zhang was most likely influenced by another literary work, *The Water Margin* which he actually adapted for the screen in 1972 (he also made another version in 1975, known as *Dangkou zhi/All Men Are Brothers*, based on episodes from the novel). *The Water Margin*'s overwhelming focus on masculine types and the theme of loyalty and brotherhood reads like a literary precursor of Zhang's *wuxia* films, though the director's *yang gang* concept pushes masculinity more to the edges of psychological obsession and may therefore be seen as a modernistic intonation of the novel's heroic prototypes.

Refashioning Masculinity

According to Zhang himself, his self-fashioning of the male heroic model was a reaction against the cinematic trend of the Hong Kong cinema in the 1950s which favoured the female star and the melodramatic propensity of romance

and tear-jerking sentimentality. The female dominance fashioned the image of the feminised scholarly romantic leading man as an ideal type in the cinema. This was in Zhang's eyes a skewed vision of masculinity, and he proceeded to do something about it. He had first to re-imagine a male hero and re-masculinise the archetype; thus he came up with an emphasis on 'hard' masculinity, a meaning also conveyed by the term *yang gang*, with *yang* being the operative term to denote maleness or the male reproductive organ. The term *yang gang* may have been derived from *jin gang*, the Chinese name of the Buddhist divine warrior Vajrapāni who wields a thunderbolt (later a staff) and is often represented in naked chest with hard muscles and ferocious countenance (Vajrapāni is one of the gods worshipped by the Shaolin monks).[10] The term *jin gang* is also often used to refer to a virile male hero.

Though Zhang has characterised his conception of *yang gang* as a reaction against the female dominance in the Hong Kong cinema, the phenomenon of re-imagining and re-masculinising the male hero goes back a long way. Chinese manhood had actually been softened throughout history and the *wuxia* fiction through the ages presenting visions of male heroes in a macho tradition was effectively a counterbalance against the 'softer, cerebral male tradition', something 'not found to the same degree in the secular West', according to Kam Louie and Louise Edwards.[11] Louie and Edwards stress that in China, 'the cerebral male model dominates that of the macho, brawny male'.[12] Martin Huang has demonstrated that the process of re-masculinising the Chinese male occurred in the field of literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The so-called *caizi jiaren* (scholar-beauty) fiction that had dominated the field began to change subtly at the beginning of the nineteenth century as writers sought to transform the *caizi* (scholar) archetype into *yingxiong* (heroes) and commentators have noted the convergence of the generic elements of *xiayi* fiction and those of *caizi jiaren* fiction.[13]

Martin Huang's case study of *Yesou puyan* presents an early model of just how the generic elements converge through an analysis of its hero Wen Suchen and his several liaisons with beautiful women as he embarks on a journey throughout the country, ostensibly as a knight-errant.[14] Interestingly, Wen Suchen was appropriated as the lead character in a Shaw Brothers production in the early, gestating period of the new school *wuxia* movement, *Wen Suchen* (*The Knight of Knights*), directed by Xue Qun but 'supervised' by Zhang Che, released in 1966. The film, a forgotten classic, was clearly an attempt to create a cinematic mould for a male *wuxia* hero who could represent both the effete sentimental scholar-hero and the new male action prototype which Zhang Che was then trying to create. The heroic-cum-romantic male archetype was superseded in popularity, first, by Zhang's macho male heroic archetype, and second, by the female knight-errant hero which King Hu would make popular.

Although both Zhang Che and King Hu recreated *wuxia* gender prototypes for the new school movement in the cinema, their self-fashioning aspects are not the same despite sharing certain similarities. Zhang's ideal model was a male *xia* and he regarded the female *xia* as an aberration although he did feature female knights-errant in some of his films. Though both directors possess artistic dispositions that draw on influences from Beijing Opera, these influences led them to divergent paths of developments. Zhang's emphasis on realistic violence, for instance, is of quite a different order from the emphasis on the *choreography* of violence in King Hu's works. Hu left Shaw Brothers to work in Taiwan, never to return to the studio. However, from a historical perspective, the work of these two directors in the *wuxia* genre is fundamentally composed of corresponding elements. The male knight-errant and the female counterpart are correlated and equivalent, at least in terms of action and the principles of *xia* which do not differentiate between genders. Their identities are relative to each other from the *yin* and *yang* perspective in the genre as a whole. Thus, Hu and Zhang complement each other more than we might think.[15]

Since Hu will be discussed in the next chapter, I will in the following paragraphs concentrate on Zhang Che's contribution to the genre. His creation and elaboration of the male heroic *xia* archetype influenced the course of the Hong Kong martial arts action cinema, covering both the *wuxia* and kung fu forms, for the next two or three decades. Zhang practically dominated the martial arts genre for some fifteen years, nurturing not only a new generation of stars but also directors and martial arts choreographers who would continue his legacy of macho self-fashioning. Directors who have worked under his wing include John Woo, Wu Ma, Lau Kar-leong, Xu Zenghong and Bao Xueli.

Zhang's first directing assignment at Shaws was as co-director (with Yuan Qiufeng) on a *huangmei diao* opera movie *Hudie bei* (*The Butterfly Chalice*, 1965). Zhang would hold up this experience as proof of his grounding in opera. In his memoirs, Zhang confessed to having had an amateur interest in performing Beijing Opera during his youth.[16] More importantly, the film was an attempt to break with convention. Zhang insisted on the male part being played by a male and not by a female (the convention being that a female star would impersonate the male role).

Zhang saw himself as a reformist who sought to break long-held conventions in the Hong Kong film industry. First, there was the image of the soft leading man of the scholar-gentry class, usually featured in romance melodramas and *huangmei diao* opera musicals. To change this image, he therefore came up with the theory of *yang gang*. Next, he wanted to demolish the taboo that the hero should never be seen in white (a taboo that came about because of cinematographers' fear that white would reflect light onto the camera in the days of black–and-white photography), and finally, that heroes should never die at the end. In breaking such taboos, as he did memorably in *The Assassin* (1967) and *The*

Golden Swallow (1968), Zhang was influenced by Beijing Opera, where the militaristic hero is often represented wearing a white suit of armour, and being killed off in grand style. In the old days, young actors looking for a big break yearned to be killed off in operas so that they could become famous. Hence, in Zhang's *wuxia* films, his central heroes often die magnificent deaths, which arouse pity and sympathy in the audience, confirming the star status of their actors.[17] Ironically, adopting these theatrical conventions from Beijing Opera allowed Zhang to highlight violence and death as an integral part of the new school objective of depicting action more realistically. Violence became a key factor in Zhang's interpretation of *yang gang*, and the director was often criticised for this as the genre became more popular.

Violence and Masculinity

To understand the violence in Zhang's films, it is pertinent to consider just how violence in *wuxia* must be regarded. Aaron Anderson has written of a 'kinesthetic understanding' of martial arts, formulating a thesis on violence as dance.[18] Such an understanding of violence was actually the basis of Maya Deren's 1948 short film *Meditation on Violence*. In his essay 'Kung Fu Film as Ghetto Myth', Stuart Kaminsky noted that the essence of the kung fu film 'is performance' and that the genre is akin to the dance musical in terms of not only the performance but also how the 'numbers' are staged.[19] However, Kaminsky qualifies this insight by saying that there is a primary difficulty for most critics to view the kung fu genre as musical expression, because the kung fu film is based upon violence, destruction and death, and 'the imposition of a moral posture (by critics) gets in the way of our understanding of the genre'. Kaminsky continues:

> Somehow, it is assumed that concentration on these aspects of human fear is too serious to handle in a mythic form, or, at least, too serious to be handled with any reference to the skill and grace of the person performing the killing regardless of his motivation within the films. This never seems to be raised as an issue when discussing the conclusions of *Richard the Third*, *Macbeth*, or *Hamlet*, however. It is the context of popular entertainment as somehow being an unfit arena for dealing with such concerns that turns the protective critic against such films.[20]

Kaminsky's words are helpful in establishing the time and context in which the martial arts films were viewed. Zhang's films today are probably considered rather tame, and critics today do adopt a less moralistic view of martial arts violence tending in fact to see the highly choreographed sequences as dance inasmuch as viewers have an implicit 'intellectual understanding that the violence itself is being performed in part for entertainment purposes'.[21] One suspects that

those critics who railed against violence in Zhang's films were probably much more taken aback by the director's idiosyncratic style than the violence itself. After all, the films are no more violent than what is depicted in the literary genre, in something like *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, for example. In a response to his critics who often remarked that there was too much *wu* (violence) rather than *xia* (chivalry) in his *wuxia* films, Zhang had this to say:

> Good *wuxia* movies must first express the spirit of esteeming martial qualities and knightly aspirations. They cannot be *wu* and not be *xia*. Strictly speaking, *wu* means putting aside the dagger-axe [here Zhang uses the Chinese phrase *zhi ge wei wu*, which illustrates that the word *wu* is an amalgam of *zhi* and *ge*, meaning to suppress the dagger-axe]. *Wu* is not chaos and rebellion, but a means to suppress chaos and rebellion. If one is not chivalric [*xia*], one is not a warrior [*wu*].[22]

From the above, Zhang appears to place greater emphasis on the virtues of *xia* heroism. To a *xia*, death was the highest honour, and it is in this engagement with death that Zhang's self-fashioning becomes flamboyantly self-evident, or narcissistic. Jerry Liu has called Zhang's idiosyncratic approach a 'glamorisation of death' in which the hero achieves 'an orgasmic fulfilment of the hidden "self"'.[23] The individual effort of death is elevated to 'supreme significance' and the death process is transformed into 'the abstraction of the sign'.[24] Chen Mo sees Zhang's violence as purely an aesthetic inclination which nevertheless subverts traditions in Chinese cinema and culture.[25]

There are two points to register here. First, the aesthetics of violence and the individualism of death override any sense of nationalism in Zhang's self-fashioning of *wuxia* identity. His films are hardly nationalistic, or if they were, the nationalism is of a very abstract kind. In fact, this was a hallmark of the new school *wuxia* films produced by Shaw Brothers, which had extensive transnational distribution networks in Southeast Asian countries and therefore sought to make their product less nationalistic and more suitable for export. This is of course not to say that the films are not culturalist or historicist, both being facets of abstract nationalism but which are also factors abstracting nationalism.

Second, Zhang's heroes are preoccupied with death because they are obsessed with a set of moral standards that come with esteeming martial values and knightly aspirations. Zhang listed the moral standards as loyalty (*zhong*), filial piety (*xiao*), moral integrity (*jie*), righteousness (*yi*).[26] By defending the depiction of violence through reference to these moral values (particularly the concept of *yi*), Zhang was in his own way forging a morality of the martial arts cinema although such a morality may be tenuous in the eyes of his critics. Olivier Assayas's comment that Zhang's films possess 'a brutal force, a ferocity, an immorality' should not be mistaken to mean that Zhang's heroes are immoral

or that his films are totally deprived of morality (Assayas was actually commenting on the irrepressible energy, a kind of demonic fire that burns in Zhang's films, but 'immorality' can be a trope of anti-establishment rebelliousness which lies at the heart of Zhang's heroic representation – more on this later).[27]

Zhang's critics might also insist that traditional moral values are not always observed in the martial arts cinema nor do they conform entirely to the actions and behaviour of the historical *xia*. James Liu makes the point that there are ideals such as individual freedom and personal loyalty that govern the behaviour of *xia*.[28] Historically, *xia* were rebellious and non-conformist in nature and their behaviour challenged traditional Confucian precepts even as they appear to act on such precepts. Zhang indeed saw *xia* as individuals who were by nature rebellious and non-conformist. In such individuals, violence can run out of hand and degenerate into pathological displays of bloodthirst and power. The depiction of power-driven pathological violence was the other side of the coin to the moral precepts of violence, thus one can argue that death is not glamorised in Zhang's films inasmuch as there is a pathological element 'written' into the supreme individual effort of death.

Zhang's self-fashioning of the *wuxia* death wish is the most distinguishing element of the new school, and insofar as violence is accentuated in the new school in both the Mandarin and the Cantonese cinemas, the conceit of death-as-the-highest-honour and its attendant morality, as Zhang utilises it, stands out as the single element that sets Mandarin *wuxia* apart from its Cantonese variant. *The Assassin* and *The Golden Swallow* are probably the most poetic statements of Zhang's ecstasy of heroic death, with no equivalents in the Cantonese cinema.

Zhang configured death theatrically and in the operatic manner. From Beijing Opera, Zhang adopted a recurring image of death by disembowelment, inspired by the opera *Jiepai guan* ('Frontier Gate') where the hero Luo Tong continues to fight after being wounded in the abdomen (he binds himself up to prevent his bowels from spilling out). Zhang constructed one of his best films *Baochou* (*Vengeance*, 1970), around this opera. The hero Guan Yulou (played by Di Long), a Beijing Opera actor, is ambushed by a gang wielding short knives; he is wounded and dies a horrific death by disembowelment in the manner of Luo Tong. To underscore this association, Zhang cross-cuts Guan's death scene with an earlier scene, now shown in slow motion, where Guan performs on stage as Luo Tong dying his magnificent death in 'Frontier Gate'.

Another striking motif, possibly influenced by Beijing Opera, was the upright death (a hero dying as he is standing up often following a prolonged battle). In *The Golden Swallow*, Silver Roc (Jimmy Wang Yu) drags himself from the final carnage of battle, and with knives stuck in his torso, declares himself the 'supreme swordsman' in his dying breath, and expires, standing up. The upright death motif was seen again in *Shisan taibao* (*The Heroic Ones*, 1970) and in *Shuang xia* (*The Deadly Duo*, 1971) and it was later adopted by Lau Kar-leong

in *The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter*. Such death scenes, played out protractedly with the fatally wounded hero still engaged in battle until he dies standing up, are perhaps over-the-top until one realises that the violence is as much poetic as metaphorical. The critics who decry violence in the genre forget that Zhang was attempting a breakthrough in exactly this aspect of *wuxia* which was derived historically. One of the qualities which Sima Qian praised of the *xia* was that 'they do not love their bodies as they go to the aid of others' – a tenet that the director has taken very much to heart.

Zhang in fact is probably the most body-conscious of film directors, which makes his acts of violence all the more disturbing. He presents lean and tight masculine bodies which he then proceeds to break apart in both a metaphorical and literal sense – literal, in at least one film, as in the scene in *The Heroic Ones* where David Chiang's body is pulled apart by horses, but in many other films, Zhang emphasises loss of limbs as a metaphor of the body and its capacity for violence (more on the body and violence as a trope of self-identity below). The scene in *The Heroic Ones* is one of the strongest statements of 'realistic violence' in the new school *wuxia* cinema, and one might further question Zhang's ethics of self-fashioning of the body in this particular manner as a method of glorifying violence or glamorisation of death.

As the debate against *wuxia* violence heated up and censorship reared its ugly head, Zhang insisted that he portrayed violence only because violence was a part of society and films only reflected reality.[29] Indeed, he referred to the 1960s as an age of chaos in explaining his motives for making *The Assassin*; he saw the hero Nie Zheng as more representative of the rebelliousness of modern youth who were distressed by the turbulence of the times (the period of the Vietnam War, the May 1968 riots, and the Cultural Revolution) and being unable to vent their anger and depression through legitimate means, resorted to violence.[30] *The Assassin* may be the most consciously political of Zhang's films in that Nie Zheng's cause may be identified more in terms of an anti-establishment, anti-authoritarian anarchism, which is part of the historical *xia* mentality. Anarchism and rebelliousness implicate the system of the patriarchy, and there is a theme in Zhang's early *wuxia* films, including *The One-Armed Swordsman*, its sequel *Dubei daowang* (*Return of the One-Armed Swordsman*, 1969) and *The Assassin*, concerning the figure of the father (or surrogate fathers such as martial arts masters) as a deficient presence, through some lack of character or strength, or else he is missing entirely. As Zhang's heroes tend to be very young, their rebelliousness against the establishment and the patriarchy gains more credence.

Masculinity, the Body and the Female Other

I have tried to show above some of the ways in which violence defines the principles of *xia* chivalry: loyalty, justice, righteousness. These principles motivate

the *xia* into action and in Zhang's films, the grace and poetics of action, mostly the work of martial arts choreographers Lau Kar-leong and Tang Jia (but later the work of the 'Five Venoms' actors who were themselves martial arts experts), tend to stress action for action's sake in the martial arts cinema – which some critics might call 'pure cinema'. Olivier Assayas, for example, tends to that view, and he is more partial to Lau Kar-leong as the principal contributor in the realisation of martial arts 'purity' in Zhang's films, of which Assayas singles out *Hongquan xiaozi* (*Disciples of Shaolin*, 1975) as the exemplary work.[31] While the dance-like choreographic displays of action in Zhang's films serve the purpose of the martial arts cinema (there can be no martial arts film without martial arts choreography), they are representations of violence which highlight the male body as an instrument of self-recognition.

The body as a trope of masculine identity has been discussed by Yvonne Tasker in relation to Bruce Lee. Tasker goes on to suggest that the role of the body in the genre is a 'constitution of gendered identities in the cinema as operating through the act of imagining and resisting bodily boundaries'.[32] The juxtaposition of martial arts and dance, according to Tasker, offers one the possibility 'of occupying a feminine position that involves . . . an explicit location of the male body on display'.[33] I take this to mean an appraisal and critique of the masculine identity of the body in the martial arts cinema.

In her own way, Tasker is invoking Foucault who says that 'nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition'.[34] Graham Longford asserts that Foucault's 'ethics of self-fashioning takes the form of a relationship to one's *self* that is ever cognizant of its fragility and contingency, and in which one seeks one's own self-overcoming'.[35] David Chiang's death scene in *The Heroic Ones* works like a violent reinterpretation of Foucault's statement on the body and his aesthetics of existence, as Longford has analysed it. In Zhang's films, such as *The One-Armed Swordsman*, *The Assassin*, *Xin dubei dao* (*The New One-Armed Swordsman*, 1971), and *Can que* (*Crippled Avengers*, 1978), the body is contingent on the attainment of the identification of self through acute violence inflicted on the body itself (resulting in the loss of body parts), failing which it is not a stable basis for self-recognition. Zhang's artistic license on violence in the sense that it reinterprets Foucault's line is a process of self-historicising.

Identity is a history of the self, and Zhang's self-fashioning of the masculine *xia* points to knowledge of the heroic self though ultimately reaffirming one's masculinity through violence and death. Some critics might attack this as fascistic and/or terroristic. I would argue that as death and violence confer an urgency of the masculine self, there is an implicit self-criticism in the very process of self-fashioning. Zhang's method is cartoon-like, operatic and appears somewhat absurd and self-transcendentalising wherein a critique of masculinity is immanent in the imagery of violence (even if his detractors might view it as a kind of

right-wing parodistic violence). Moreover, as models of imperfect male specimens, the crippled heroes in Zhang's films are more plausible representations of subaltern male identity and masculinity in crisis than of master races and triumphant masculinity. *Bao biao* (*Have Sword Will Travel*, 1969) and *Ci Ma* (*Blood Brothers*, 1973), two of the director's best and underrated works, are less operatic but not less poetic examinations of death and masculinity which seem to me intrinsically critical of *wuxia* morality and the masculine code. Both films also feature women as catalysts of male division and patriarchal hypocrisy.

In Zhang's early films, violence and sex are matching elements motivating the hero into action. In *The One-Armed Swordsman*, the hero's arm is chopped off by a woman because he trusted her in an off-guard moment (she cuts off his arm out of pique and jealousy). In *The Golden Swallow*, the hero goes on a killing rampage in order to lure the female knight-errant he loves, Golden Swallow, into his embrace, arousing the jealousy of a second hero in love with the same woman. In *Feidao shou* (*The Flying Dagger*, 1968), the male hero (played by Luo Lie) demands to sleep with the female protagonist (played by Zheng Peipei) for saving the life of her father. This is the most direct declaration of sexuality in Zhang's films which otherwise tend to show women tending to the body wounds of the men as a form of sexual declaration, as in *The One-Armed Swordsman*, *The New One-Armed Swordsman*, and *Ying wang* (*King Eagle*, 1971).

Sex as a deadly catalyst of the collapse of *xia* solidarity and brotherhood is the theme of *Blood Brothers*. Di Long's character Ma Xinyi breaks the taboo of falling in love with the wife of sworn brother Huang Zong (Chen Guantai); Ma then causes Huang's death which then leads the third brother Zhang Wenxiang (David Chiang) to assassinate Ma, who has become the Provincial Governor. Sexual infidelity is an infraction of the principle of brotherhood as 'a paradigm for political loyalty', which is a theme introduced in the classic novel *The Water Margin*.[36] *Blood Brothers* was remade by Peter Chan as *Touming zhuang* (*The Warlords*), released in 2007, where this theme was made prominent by stressing the tragedy and the rigidity of the code of brotherhood through Chan's decision to portray the two key adulterous protagonists sympathetically. In Zhang's film, the adulterers are not portrayed sympathetically and it is the code of brotherhood, as personified by David Chiang, which rules the moral high ground.

Apart from the relatively few films which feature female knights-errant, of which the exemplary work is *The Golden Swallow*, Zhang's films on the whole betray a bias towards the male and tend to preclude female warriors from the company of men. In Zhang's opinion, it was unnatural for women to become warriors and he considered the female warrior a truly fantastic conceit. *The Golden Swallow* featured Zheng Peipei in the same role she played in King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* but she appears more constrained under Zhang's direc-

tion. Golden Swallow is essentially the Female Other, relative to Silver Roc, the male hero played by Jimmy Wang Yu. He constitutes the self-fashioning body of the masculine self and is Zhang's focus of the film. As such, Zheng Peipei instinctively considered Zhang a misogynist and turned down the part at first in the hope that King Hu would replace Zhang.[37] Realising that this would not happen, Zheng eventually relented but her wariness in accepting the part under Zhang's direction was borne out by the finished film, which is basically a paean to Jimmy Wang Yu's Silver Roc.

Still, the counteractive presence of Golden Swallow as a female knight-errant adds a softer *yin* dimension to the male *yang gang* personalities portrayed by Jimmy Wang Yu and Luo Lie (the other male hero who is Silver Roc's rival for the affections of Golden Swallow). This is true of those of Zhang's films where the female knight-errant has a presence amidst a male fellowship of *xia*, such as *The Flying Dagger*, *Have Sword Will Travel*, *King Eagle*. The male heroes tend to be feminised and domesticated by the female presence and they become extra vulnerable. The Female Other, particularly a female knight-errant who represents a proto-feminist type, can be a dangerous threat to masculinity. The perfect exposition of this principle is seen in *Shengsi men* (*Life Gamble*, 1979), featuring a trio of *femmes fatales* who combine sex and martial arts with deadly efficacy.

In her comments on Bruce Lee, Yvonne Tasker shrewdly observes that 'the hardness of Lee's body and of his star image emerges from a history of softness, a history of images in which both Chinese men and women had been represented as passive and compliant'.[38] She explains that 'Lee's image speaks of a struggle to become hard, to negate an imputed softness'. Zhang's male heroes with their hard bodies display the residual effect of softness, imputed or otherwise. On a psycho-historical level, the presence of a female warrior figure raises the tantalising question of what the inner nature of the male hero really is in the Chinese cinema, given Tasker's point about the 'history of softness' and the history of male passivity and compliance towards women in the cinema. Masculinity and hardness becomes an imposition, in effect, a construction, and death eventually resolves the contradictions of *yang* against *yin*.

On the other hand, softness and passivity are also constructions of male identity, historically imposed on the male scholar gentry. Zhang's *yang gang* heroes are precariously balanced between *yin* and *yang* sides. Perhaps after all, the Wen Suchen prototype of the romantic knight-errant capable of both sexual love and violent action, is the ideal hero, and this model has indeed influenced many of Zhang's male protagonists such as Silver Roc in *The Golden Swallow* and Nie Zheng in *The Assassin* (these two examples will suffice as there are too many of this romantic-heroic type in Zhang's vast output to enumerate here).

The *yin* presence in many other Zhang Che films provides sexual and spiritual comfort to the male, as spouses, prostitutes, or courtesans, as in *The One-Armed*

Swordsman, *The Assassin*, *The Golden Swallow*, *Vengeance* and *Da juedou* (*The Duel*, 1971). Here the Female Other uses sex as an intrusion into the masculine nature of the heroes. The celibate nature of *xia* is quickly emphasised in most cases, though some apparently do find a happy sexual union with the female, as demonstrated by Jimmy Wang Yu's one-armed hero in *The One-Armed Swordsman* and *The Return of the One-Armed Swordsman* (but here perhaps it needed the hero to lose an arm before he could be secure enough to find sexual happiness with the female). On the whole, however, Zhang's heroes give the impression that they would rather be in male company, engaged in violent action together.

That Zhang's films are suffused with homoerotic undertones is now largely accepted, particularly those featuring David Chiang and Di Long, as in *Sijiao* (*Dead End*, 1969), *Have Sword Will Travel*, *The Heroic Ones*, *The New One-Armed Swordsman*, *The Duel*, *The Deadly Duo*, *Blood Brothers*. In all these films, two heroes are attracted to each other through violence, either as opponents in a final duel or as allies fighting scores of enemies. Zhang's self-fashioning of bare-chested *wuxia* heroes and their violent dances of death provide a rich collection of gender imagery, the 'kind of fodder on which gay men would linger', as Michael Lam has put it.[39] It also reinforces Tasker's contention that 'the martial arts film has evolved as a cinematic form that allows men to look at men'.[40] In allowing 'men to look at men', albeit often in violent imagery, Zhang's films are regarded by homosexuals as self-affirming of identity, as demonstrated in Stanley Kwan's documentary, *Yang ±Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema* (1996).

Thus far, the discussion has centred on Zhang Che's self-fashioning of the hard-masculine (*yang gang*) *wuxia* hero, which seems to be the only contribution that the director is remembered for in the cinema. The Chinese inscription on the Life Achievement Award presented to Zhang in 1992 by the Hong Kong Film Directors Guild actually commends the director for 'pioneering *yang gang* action movies' (in English, the term 'machismo' is used), which now seems a bit odd, being too narrow and somewhat defiantly politically incorrect in today's social environment, until one remembers that the legacy Zhang Che left behind was the dominance of male stars in Hong Kong's action cinema. Despite the strong presence of the female knight-errant in the new school *wuxia* cinema, the masculine hero became a fixture under Zhang's guidance and self-fashioning enterprise.

Remarkably, the male hero was a modern presence inasmuch as he was hard, masculine and violent – an object and subject not really seen before in Chinese movies. The watershed figure here is of course Bruce Lee. Though Lee did not work with Zhang, the star embodies the director's *yang gang* concept such that he could be a Zhang Che creation, and indeed the mould of Zhang's *yang gang* hero looked similar to Lee (cf. Di Long, Chen Guantai, Alexander

Fu Sheng, Danny Lee, Qi Guanjun, and the so-called 'Five Venoms', the stars whom he introduced in that film: Guo Zhui, Luo Meng, Lu Feng, Sun Jian and Jiang Sheng).

It has to be said that Zhang's cultivation of male stars was not one-note and without variation. One can see the range and scope of his male heroes throughout his career, from the romantic *wuxia* portrayals of Jimmy Wang Yu and David Chiang to the Shaolin kung fu heroes of Chen Guantai, Di Long, Qi Guanjun, and Alexander Fu Sheng to the 'Five Venoms'. The *yang gang* masculinity of a slender, lithe figure like David Chiang always seemed tentative and timorous. Di Long and Chen Guantai were more convincing *yang gang* types, but suffused with, and some might say, troubled by, *xia* romanticism, which made them quite unlike Bruce Lee, whose persona was more belligerent (due in no small part to the theme of nationalism and ethnic pride in his films). The self-fashioning of the masculine hero from Di Long to Chen Guantai is quite subtle. Chen is harder but not less romantic than Di Long: cf. Di Long in *Vengeance*, *Dead End*, *The Duel*, and Chen Guantai in *Ma Yongzhen* (*The Boxer from Shantung*, 1972), *Chou Lianhuan* (*Man of Iron*, 1972) and *Dadao wangwu* (*The Iron Bodyguard*, 1973).

Zhang further modulated the *yang gang* type into a rascally delinquent-hero mode which he labelled *xiaozi* ('little kid'),[41] best personified by Alexander Fu Sheng in *Disciples of Shaolin*, which was his tribute to Bruce Lee by remaking the star's image into a more child-like naïf, with a foot fetish. The *xiaozi* persona is an interesting variation of *yang gang*, less muscular, a post-pubescent masculine rebel-without-a-cause figure fated to die young and tragically, like a Chinese version of James Dean, which is how Alexander Fu Sheng's hero in *Disciples of Shaolin* ends up (in real life, the star also died young, from a tragic car accident). Assayas has observed, correctly, that Zhang sees the destiny of the martial arts hero as essentially a tragic one.[42] Despite all the variations of the *yang gang* hero, it is of course their tragic destiny which unites them, in such a way that we might see tragedy as being the equivalent of their masculinity.

Thus, Zhang's contribution to the Chinese cinema was the realisation of a male heroic, martial arts action archetype which Chinese filmmakers sought to create but never quite succeeded since the 1920s when the theory of New Heroism was put forward. Instead, following the rise of the *wuxia* genre in the late 1920s, what seemed more entrenched was the female knight-errant figure, which, according to Zhang Zhen 'drastically changed the image of an earlier generation of actresses who, despite their modern looks, had the residual features and constrained body language of the traditional woman'.[43]

Zhang Che's *yang gang* archetype drastically changed the image of an earlier generation of male actors by modernising the image from the previous soft scholar type into one with a body language for unconstrained violence and

masculinity. This modernisation was done along Western lines such that the Chinese male action star could be seen on a par with Western heroic stereotypes – as Chinese equivalents, say, of John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Sean Connery, or Charles Bronson, all of whom were popular in Asia at the time just before and after the ascendancy of the new school *wuxia* movement.

In the discussion on the pre-eminence of the masculine hero in Zhang's cinema, I have let it overshadow the director's technical achievements in *mise en scène* and narration. For lack of space, I will here simply give a rough sketch of what I deem to be this prolific director's most outstanding works and their features: the classical literary poeticism of *The Golden Swallow*; the apocalyptic moodiness of *The Assassin* and its long passages of talk before the climactic action; the stylish *Have Sword Will Travel*, a mature romantic *wuxia* film that is one of Zhang's overlooked masterpieces with a striking action climax set inside a pagoda and David Chiang going into action with a fore-vision of his own death; the final homoerotic duel between David Chiang and Di Long in *The Duel*; David Chiang's final duel and death in *Vengeance*; the entertaining weapons gimmickry as a distortion and/or extension of *xia* character in *Return of the One-Armed Swordsman*; the structuralism and formalism of films such as *Vengeance*, *Blood Brothers*, *Disciples of Shaolin*, showing Zhang's fondness for slow motion and the flashback. *Blood Brothers* is a significant work for Di Long's searing portrayal of a perfidious *wuxia* hero who double-crosses his 'brothers' through sex with the wife of one of his brothers. The excellent *Life Gamble* is one of Zhang's most stylish works, memorably combining female villainy and male heroic interplay.

As a literary-minded director, Zhang spans classical old school and new school, making adaptations of *The Water Margin* and Jin Yong novels. His adaptation of Jin Yong's *Xiake xing* (*Ode to Gallantry*), released in 1982, is an interesting structural piece. Zhang also reverted back to the *shenguai wuxia* formula emphasising fantasy, as Chen Mo has noted, with films like *Nazha* (*Na Cha, The Great*, 1974) and *Hong haier* (*The Fantastic Magic Baby*, 1975).[44] He also treated the *gongan* subgenre with relish, as in *Blood Brothers* and *Wu du* (*The Five Venoms*, 1978). Zhang oversaw the evolution of new school *wuxia* into kung fu, gracefully making the transition with *Vengeance*, which was the first kung fu film he made to anticipate the rise of Bruce Lee, and moving on to his own 'Shaolin series', reintroducing the *yang gang* archetype as kung fu masters, *Fang Shiyu yu Hong Xiguan* (*Heroes Two*), *Shaolin zidi* (*Men from the Monastery*), *Hongquan yu Yongchun* (*Shaolin Martial Arts*), *Shaolin wuzu* (*Five Shaolin Masters*), all released in 1974. Zhang's seamless transition from *wuxia* to kung fu is a measure of his confidence in self-fashioning the masculine hero. Finally, Zhang also experimented with *wuxia* in modern dress in several films, *Dadao gewang* (*The Singing Thief*, 1969), *Xiao shaxing* (*The Singing Killer*, 1970), *E ke* (*The Angry Guest*,

1972), *Si qishi* (*Four Riders*, 1972), showing a ready disposition for genre mixing, aware that *wuxia* and its theme of loyalty and fidelity can exceed time and history.

Cathay's *Wuxia* Response

Shaw Brothers launched the new school *wuxia* genre as its main rival, the Cathay studio, underwent a period of slowdown and restructuring following the death of its founder Loke Wan Tho from an aeroplane crash in 1964. The studio changed its name in 1965 from MP and GI (Motion Picture and General Investment) to Cathay, the name of the parent company based in Singapore.[45] Loke's death was an immense setback to the MP and GI studio. He had personally overseen its operations and was responsible for a 'home style' expressed through contemporary genres such as comedies, romances and musicals, which were used as vehicles for the studio's female stars, among them Lucilla You Min, Julie Ye Feng, Jeanette Lin Cui and Grace Chang.

The studio's fortunes were tied to the successes of these female stars but the demise of Loke signalled the end of the female ascendancy. Cathay took up the cudgel to make its own new school *wuxia* movies in 1966, one year after the cycle began under Shaws. However, it did not or could not cultivate young male stars of the calibre of Jimmy Wang Yu or such later Zhang Che discoveries as David Chiang and Di Long to convey the trait of masculine hardness. Lacking the charismatic young actors to portray the new heroic prototype, Cathay tried instead to remould the image of the male *wuxia* hero by injecting ingredients of comedy or parody, as in *Xiaomian xia* (*The Smiling Swordsman*, 1968), directed by Jiang Nan, and *Shenjing dao* (*Mad, Mad, Mad Sword*, 1969), directed by Wang Tianlin. Second leads or character actors who were part of the studio's repertory company played the leading roles. These films are among the first examples of parodies of the genre.

Since it lacked the male stars, Cathay instead cultivated young female stars as knight-errant heroes. The studio's first significant *wuxia* movie, *Diyi jian* (*The First Sword*, 1967), directed and written by Tu Guangqi, after his own novel, introduced Melinda Chen Manling whose energetic performance in the film was calculated to follow the examples of Zheng Peipei in King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* (1966) and Shangguan Lingfeng in the same director's *Dragon Inn* (1967). She plays the fourth mistress of a clan whose leader (played by Zhao Lei) is the target of a plot hatched by a rival clan leader to kill him and secure a secret manual so as to dominate the world of the martial arts.

The intricate plot, drawing on the thriller conventions of the *gongan* ('public case') subgenre, makes *The First Sword* an offbeat *wuxia* picture with an emphasis on intrigue and suspense rather than action although there were many stylish action sequences. The utilisation of elements such as the application of

poisons (including poisonous fumes spewing forth from the palm of one's hand: a malevolent take on the *Buddha's Palm* complex), and the manipulation of underground panels and punishment rooms evoking the *jiguan* convention typical of the Cantonese *wuxia* serial further distinguish the film.

The First Sword showed that Cathay could successfully utilise the generic elements of *wuxia*. The key factor of its success was the induction of its new female star, Melinda Chen, as the studio's female knight-errant mascot. In Chen, Cathay had at least found a viable *wuxia* star of either sex to continue producing films of the genre to compete with those of Shaw Brothers, which had their own roster of female knight-errant stars. Cathay quickly featured Melinda Chen in a succession of *wuxia* movies. Probably the best is *Long Muxiang* (*Cold Blade*, 1970), the first *wuxia* film directed by Chu Yuan who would later join Shaw Brothers to make a series of *wuxia* films based on the new school novels of Gu Long. Here, Melinda Chen plays Long Muxiang, a Tartar princess loyal to the Yuan dynasty who disguises herself as a patriotic Chinese female knight-errant helping the cause of the crumbling Song dynasty so that she can obtain a map containing a military secret from two swordsmen of the 'Wind and Thunder School', each given one half of the map for protection. Muxiang pretends to fall in love with one of the swordsmen, Ling Tianxiao (played by Gao Yuan) and tries to influence him to change sides.

Cold Blade plays like a dialectical treatise about the roles of male and female knights-errant. From her perspective as a female, Muxiang argues that she would never in her life be confined to the kitchen. 'We should aim to be famous', she says. In contrast, Tianxiao is a more constrained figure. Seduced by the force of Muxiang's arguments, Tianxiao betrays his school, the code of knight-errantry, and his country, to follow Muxiang in search of fame and honour. In the final sequence, Muxiang reveals her true identity and must fight an unavoidable duel with Tianxiao with whom she has now fallen in love. 'Why was I born in the Yuan and you in the Song?', Muxiang asks, referring to their respective 'nations' which divide them. The 'nationalism' of the genre takes on a tragic-ironic edge, as does the figure of the female knight-errant portrayed in this instance by Melinda Chen, who perfectly captures the treacherous ambivalence of the character. Chen's performance provides a striking revision of the heroic female knight-errant archetype – one of the factors that made the film memorable, together with Chu Yuan's highly assured, stylish direction.

The idea of the revisionist hero was also at the centre of the two of the best *wuxia* movies produced by Cathay as the studio reached the final stages of its existence before it closed down in 1971. They were *Hushan xing* (*Escorts over Tiger Hills*), released in 1969, and *Lu ke yu dao ke* (*From the Highway*), released in 1970. As it turned out, these two movies were the most expensive productions that Cathay ever invested in. *Escorts over Tiger Hills*, directed by Wang Xinglei on a massive budget of HK$1.2 million was Cathay's first attempt

to come up with a *wuxia* blockbuster since the studio went through a phase of restructuring.[46]

Production on *Escorts* took over a year, quite unprecedented for a Hong Kong film. Shooting began in 1968 on Taiwan locations, and went on for eight months. The influence of King Hu's *Dragon Inn* was clearly seen in the meticulous design and costumes (of the Song dynasty period), the portrayals of a stoic male hero (played in this instance by Roy Chiao), his powerful nemesis in the person of an eunuch with grey hair and eyebrows (recalling the eunuch portrayed by Bai Ying in *Dragon Inn*), the inclusion of a female swordfighter (played by Hilda Zhou Xuan), and finally, the swordfighting choreography by Han Yingjie, Hu's action choreographer, that unmistakably brings up associations with the style of *Dragon Inn*.

The story concerns a military unit loyal to the Song emperor, escorting a group of Tartar prisoners to a border command across the Si River in mountainous Shandong province for an exchange of prisoners. Tartar soldiers lie in wait en route to ambush the unit; their objective is to free the prisoners, among whom is a Tartar prince, and to kill the Song commander, Jing Wuji (Roy Chiao). Jing is an ex-guerrilla fighter against the Tartars who had retreated into a monastery to become a monk to atone for the violence he had taken part in. He is now recalled by his old general to serve as backup to the military escort and assumes command after its commanding officer is killed. The Tartar commander is Wanyan Qing, the head of the Tartar secret service. Wanyan mobilises his adopted daughter, Wan'er (Hilda Zhou Xuan), in the effort to stop Jing from reaching his objective. Wan'er is Jing's wife whom he had abandoned in order to enter the monastery. She now seeks revenge on Jing by working as a spy for the Tartars, keeping one step ahead of Jing before springing the final trap.

The film offers an unusual variation on the heroic *xia* personality. On first sight, Jing Wuji appears like the typical knight-errant, wearing a bamboo hat and walking through the landscape in a purposeful gait with a sword on his waist. But he is far from being a conventional knight-errant, being also an ex-guerrilla fighter, a monk, a married man with two wives, a reserve soldier. By making Jing Wuji a monk, the plot is infused with Buddhist concepts of atonement for past sins, and the search for enlightenment and redemption against a background of violence. Yet, Jing is also a soldier-*xia*, and must therefore operate within the codes of both the army and of knight-errantry. Hence there is a heroic dilemma. The hero is bound by the Buddhist taboo against killing but as a soldier-warrior, he is bound by patriotism and loyalty.

The treatment of the central hero makes the movie stand apart from the standard Shaw Brothers *yang gang* movie. The film pays a certain tribute to King Hu's *Dragon Inn* but in many ways, director Wang Xinglei's approach is even bolder and more visceral than Hu's in delineating violence as a barometer of

character and moral anguish. As the violence increases around Jing Wuji, he is finally driven to kill. Jing is tormented by the realisation that he has betrayed his own soul (director Wang punctuates this with a freeze frame). Jing cries out like a mad animal and continues to slash his sword at imaginary enemies after his real enemies have all been killed, illustrated by superimpositions of an army of enemy soldiers against whom Jing swings his sword. In the finale, Jing kills Wanyan Qing in a fight sequence achieved though a remarkable feat of flash editing that create impressionistic glimpses of violence, on a class with King Hu's later achievements. Jing's victory comes at a cost as it results in the death of Wan'er, who, through death, finally shows her loyalty to her husband. Wan'er's sacrifice leads Jing into another bout of anguish. Thus, the whole movie poses a question mark over the heroic stereotype as well as questioning the tenet of violence in the genre.

From the Highway, directed by Zhang Zengze, was also produced on the same massive HK$1.2 million budget that was allocated to *Escorts over Tiger Hills*.[47] The budget, three times greater than for a normal Hong Kong movie, indicated the kind of financial resources that Cathay could still draw upon despite its decline. In fact, the two films were produced over the period 1968–1969 after Cathay had rejected a proposed merger with Shaws; these productions being undertaken on a large scale personally overseen by the production chief Yeo Ban Yee, most likely so that Cathay could show that its fundamentals were sound.[48] Taking over a year to make, more than a third of the budget was expended on a huge set of an early Republican-period fortress in the middle of the northern Chinese plains. The set, constructed in the outskirts of Taichung, in central Taiwan, was reported to have covered the expanse of an airport runway.

The fortress, home to hundreds of families, is besieged by a group of marauding bandits. Strongly defended, the bandit chief sends an advance party to enter the fortress disguised as travelling martial arts acrobats-cum-medicine peddlers, headed by 'Pigtail' Zhang (played by Taiwanese actor Sun Yue), so named because he uses his pigtail as a deadly whip. Zhang's martial arts abilities impress Master An, the lord of the fortress, who hires him as chief coach to his militia. A passing stranger (played by Yang Qun) informs Master An that Zhang is a bandit doing the bidding of bandit chief Xu Kun (Cui Fusheng). Xu, nicknamed 'Iron Gourd' because his chief weapon is his bald head, is the man the stranger wants to kill in order to avenge the death of his master. The stranger volunteers his services to protect the fortress and its inhabitants, rescuing the master's son after he had been abducted, and finally saving the master himself from Iron Gourd, who, by using his head as a battering ram, had successfully breached the gate and was now burning down the fortress.[49]

Though overshadowed by the villains (the colourful 'Iron Gourd' and 'Pigtail' Zhang), the taciturn stranger remains a significant character in the film

because of his fighting style. In his fight-to-the-death scenes with 'Pigtail' Zhang and 'Iron Gourd', the stranger uses only his bare hands, a refreshing change from the swordplay in standard *wuxia* pictures. *From the Highway*, in fact, is distinguished by its variations on the genre. Instead of an ancient dynastic setting, the film locates the genre in the early Republican period. One of the film's most attractive features is the recreation of this period, showing a traditional northern Chinese community on the threshold of modernity, indulging in western curiosities such as the peepshow. Hence, the film functions like a 'modern *wuxia*' movie where the protagonists use guns and cannons as well as traditional weaponry (here, the influence of the Spaghetti Western on the *wuxia* genre is certainly palpable).

The kung fu fighting style may also be seen as a 'modern' feature of the film, a sign of things to come. When it was released in February 1970, *From the Highway* was effectively the first Mandarin movie to signal a shift in the martial arts genre from *wuxia* to kung fu.[50] Within a few months, Shaw Brothers took up the cue, producing Zhang Che's *Vengeance*, and Wang Yu's *Longhu dou* (*The Chinese Boxer*), both set in the early Republican period. Together with *From the Highway*, all these films anticipated the kung fu boom, but unlike most of the kung fu films after the rise and demise of Bruce Lee which highlighted southern settings and fighting styles, they featured northern China settings and northern schools of martial arts that were firmly identified with the Mandarin cinema.

Cathay continued to make several more *wuxia* pictures until its abrupt closure in 1971. One of the last acts of the studio was to cancel the production of a *wuxia* movie then in progress entitled *The Inn of the Goddess*, starring Melinda Chen.[51] Golden Harvest, the new company set up by Raymond Chow, Shaws' ex-production chief, bought Cathay's studio premises and agreed to distribute the remaining Cathay productions. It was Golden Harvest who secured the services of Bruce Lee when Cathay's old rival, Shaw Brothers, passed him over. Bruce Lee brought on the rise of the modern kung fu genre, as recounted in the last chapter, which ended the *wuxia* resurgence from 1965–1971.

Conclusion

The era of the rise and development of the new school *wuxia* film in the Hong Kong cinema marks the defining moment in which the classic male and female knight-errant figures in the *wuxia* genre were fully realised as cinematic archetypes for the modern audience (such archetypes are still operable in a film such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, for example). Zhang Che was the key figure in this movement since he defined the male heroic archetype as a hard, masculine type with characteristics of romanticism, literariness and violence. Zhang's concentration on the male heroic archetype meant that he was also the

master of violence and this combination often was perceived critically, his films often attacked as a glorification of violence. But Zhang essentially drew the pattern of the new school *wuxia* movement in the cinema with his idiosyncratic retrofitting of the historicist mould of the genre into a modern framework. Violence was already a vivid form in *wuxia* literature as anyone who has read *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Water Margin* and *A Tale of Heroic Lovers* will know, but the cinema's propensity towards realism made it more real and therefore disturbing.

The cinematic realism of violence superseded the emphasis on the fantastic in the old *shenguai wuxia* formula, and the association of violence and masculinity heightened the perception that the genre was invariably a male-dominated one. It is true that as *wuxia* transmuted into the kung fu form in the 1970s, the masculine hero became pre-eminent in a way unimaginable before the rise of the new school, and this was in no small part an outcome of Zhang Che's insistent self-fashioning of the male heroic prototype as the director himself went through the phases from *wuxia* to kung fu. However, the new school *wuxia* movement re-engaged the archetype of the female knight-errant, largely through the self-fashioning of King Hu. In the next chapter, I will address Hu's work, where I will also discuss the female knight-errant and her own role of self-identification.

Notes

1. For an account of the 'Battle in Macau' and its impact on the press media, see John Christopher Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen*, pp. 3–11.
2. See John Minford, 'The Deer and the Cauldron – the Adventures of a Chinese Trickster,' *East Asian History*, No. 5, June 1993, 1–14, esp. p. 4. See Hamm, *Paper Swordsmen*, p. 119.
3. See Lo Wai-luk, *Rulai shenzhang yishu biji* ('Notes on the Artistry of Buddha's Palm'), pamphlet published by Pearl City Video in conjunction with the 2001 VCD release of the original five-episode series, p. 4. A sequel entitled 'Buddha's Spiritual Palm Returned', in two episodes, was released in 1968, not featuring the original stars Tso Tat-wah and Yu So-chau. This sequel is usually not mentioned in connection with the *Buddha's Palm* five-episode series.
4. Lo Wai-luk, *Rulai shenzhang yishu biji*, p. 10.
5. Ibid., p. 10.
6. See 'Caise wuxia xin gongshi' ('Shaws Launches "Action Era"'), *Nanguo dianying* ('Southern Screen'), No. 92, October 1965, p. 30.
7. Ibid., p. 30.
8. See *Xianggang yinghua* ('Hong Kong Movie News'), No. 9, September 1966, p. 28.
9. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 2.
10. On Vajrapāni, see Meir Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery*, pp. 37–42, pp. 83–92.
11. See Kam Louie and Louise Edwards, 'Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing *Wen* and *Wu*', *East Asian History*, No. 8, December 1994, 135–148, esp. p. 138.
12. Ibid., p. 138.
13. See Martin Huang, 'From Caizi to Yingxiong', pp. 62–63.

14. Ibid., pp. 64–76. On *Yesou puyan* and its hero-protagonist Wen Suchen, see also Maram Epstein, 'Rewriting Sexual Ideals in Yesou puyan', in Martin and Heinrich (ed.), *Embodied Modernities*, pp. 60–78.
15. For a partisan commentary on Zhang Che over King Hu, see David Desser, 'Making Movies Male: Zhang Che and the Shaw Brothers Martial Arts Movies, 1965–1975', in Laikwan Pang and Day Wong (ed.), *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), pp. 17–34.
16. Zhang Che, *Huigu Xianggang dianying sanshi nian*, p. 16.
17. Ibid., pp. 48–50.
18. See Aaron Anderson, 'Violent Dances in Martial Arts Films'.
19. Stuart Kaminsky, 'Kung Fu Film as Ghetto Myth', p. 138
20. Ibid., p. 140.
21. See Aaron Anderson, 'Violent Dances in Martial Arts Films'.
22. Zhang Che, 'Tan wuxia pian' ('A Discussion on *Wuxia* Pictures'), *Nanguo dianying* ('Southern Screen'), No. 126, August 1968, pp. 34–35.
23. See Jerry Liu, 'Chang Cheh; Aesthetics=Ideology?', in Lau Shing-hon (ed.), *A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film*, pp. 159–164, esp. p. 160.
24. Ibid., p. 161.
25. See Chen Mo, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi*, p. 141.
26. Zhang Che, 'Tan wuxia pian'.
27. See Olivier Assayas, 'Chang Cheh, L'ogre de Hong-Kong', *Cahiers du Cinema*, Special Issue 'Made in Hong Kong', No. 360–361, September 1984, 50–52, esp. p. 50.
28. See James Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, p. 5.
29. See 'Li Xing, Zhang Che da juedou' ('The Duel between Li Xing and Zhang Che'), *Yinse shijie* ('Cinemart'), No. 39, March 1973, p. 31.
30. See Zhang Che,'Tan Da cike' ('Discussing The Assassin'), *Xianggang yinghua* ('Hong Kong Movie News'), No. 25, January 1968, 60–61, esp. p. 60.
31. See Olivier Assayas, 'Chang Cheh, L'ogre de Hong-Kong', p. 52.
32. See Yvonne Tasker, 'Fists of Fury', in Eleftheriotis and Needham (ed.), *Asian Cinemas: A Reader and Guide*, p. 454.
33. Ibid., p. 442.
34. Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 153.
35. See Graham Longford, 'Sensitive Killers, Cruel Aesthetics, and Pitiless Poets: Foucault, Rorty, and the Ethics of Self-Fashioning', *Polity*, 33:4, Summer 2001, 569–592, esp. p. 577.
36. See John Fitzgerald, 'Continuity within Discontinuity: The Case of Water Margin Mythology', *Modern China*, 12:3, July 1986, 361–400, esp. p. 377.
37. See video interview with Zheng Peipei, recorded on 10 January 1998, in the Hong Kong Film Archive's 'Oral History' project.
38. Tasker, 'Fists of Fury', p. 445.
39. See Michael Lam, 'The Mysterious Gayness in Chang Cheh's Unhappy World', in Wong Ain-ling (ed.), *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003), pp. 175–186, esp. p. 182.
40. Tasker, 'Fists of Fury', p. 441.
41. 'Xiaozi', as Chen Mo has noted, is a term used by northern Chinese which Zhang Che introduced into the Cantonese environment of the Hong Kong cinema. See Chen Mo, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi*, p. 134.
42. Assayas, 'Chang Cheh, L'ogre de Hong-Kong', p. 52.
43. Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, p. 200.

44. Chen Mo, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi*, p. 134.
45. For an overview of the history of Singapore's Cathay Organisation and its production companies in Singapore and Hong Kong, see Lim Kay Tong, *Cathay 55 Years of Cinema* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1991). See also Wong Ain-ling (ed.), *The Cathay Story* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002).
46. See 'Qiao Hong pian chou bawan yuan?' ('Chiao Hung Gets $80,000 Per Film?'), *Yinhe huabao* ('Milky Way Pictorial'), No. 132, March 1969, pp. 44–45. See also *Escorts over Tiger Hills* Special Issue brochure, p. 2.
47. *From the Highway* Special Issue brochure, p. 8.
48. For more on the proposed merger, see Liu Yafo, 'Shaoshi Guotai hebing muhou xiaoxi' ('Behind-the-Scenes Information on Shaws-Cathay Merger'), *Yinhe huabao* ('Milky Way Pictorial'), No. 120, March 1968, p. 27; and Liu, 'Shaoshi Guotai hebing zhi mi' ('The Puzzle of the Shaws-Cathay Merger'), *Yule huabao* ('Screen and Stage Pictorial'), No. 82, April 1968, p. 29.
49. The expensive set, costing over HK$300,000 to build, was thus destroyed. See Jiang Jie, 'The Fall of Cathay Organisation', *Yinse shijie* ('Cinemart'), July 1971, p. 28.
50. *From the Highway* was Cathay's most successful movie, its gross takings just falling short of HK$1 million. See Jiang Jie, 'The Fall of Cathay Organisation', p. 28.
51. See Lau Shing-hon (ed.), *A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film*, p. 237. For a report on Cathay's ignominious end, see Jiang Jie, 'The Fall of Cathay Organisation', pp. 28–29.

5. THE *WUXIA* FILMS OF KING HU

In the previous chapter, I stated that King Hu and Zhang Che were the two most recognised directors of the new school *wuxia* movement. To Hu, the *wuxia* genre was a vehicle with which to transmit his thoughts on the historicist model of the female knight-errant in at least two key films of the movement, *Come Drink With Me* and *A Touch of Zen*. Zhang Che on the other hand fashioned the masculine identity of *xia* as a heroic archetype in the Hong Kong cinema and changed its culture of the feminised leading man that had prevailed for nearly two decades. Zhang saw the *wuxia* genre as a reaction against the Hong Kong cinema's conservatism as well as against the staid norms of the genre itself, particularly in the depiction of *xia* heroism which he interpreted as a predominantly male form and activity. Given that Hu is generally recognised for his self-fashioning identification with the female knight-errant, it is worth asking whether the prominence he gave to the female knight-errant was eventually a reaction against the trend of the masculine hero which gathered momentum under Zhang's direction. At the same time, it is also worth investigating how the male and female knight-errant archetypes interacted with each other in his films.

The female knight-errant was a standard part in the repertoire of roles for female stars in both the Cantonese and Mandarin cinemas of the 1950s. Yu Sochau and Wu Lizhu were popular role models as female knights-errant in Cantonese films, while Li Lihua, Betty Le Di and Zhang Zhongwen reincarnated the role in sporadic Mandarin films though they did not become identified as *wuxia* stars, unlike their counterparts in the Cantonese cinema, nor did

they actually start a trend of female knight-errant movies in the Mandarin cinema. The image of the female knight-errant involved a dual personality of masculine and feminine sides, as represented by the figure of Thirteenth Sister from the novel *A Tale of Heroic Lovers*, which Shaw Brothers actually adapted into a film in 1959 as *Heroine* (I will return to the masculine-feminine persona of Thirteenth Sister later).[1]

The Mandarin female stars of this period conformed to the overall trend in the public taste, which was in favour of a conservative feminised image emphasising softness, beauty and other romantic qualities. It was in this environment that Zhang Che began to conceive his masculine hero prototype of the *yang gang* class, but no one in this period paid sufficient attention to the female knight-errant prototype and it is probably true to say that the image of the knight-errant as a female warrior never gained credibility in the Mandarin cinema, until King Hu came along.

Hu began his career in Shaw Brothers as an actor, mostly in character roles. He did not become involved in the *wuxia* genre until 1965 when he was given the chance to direct *Come Drink With Me*. Knight-errantry as a theme was not immediately obvious in Hu's first few works as director. After making a handful of historical films in the *haungmei diao* opera genre under the aegis of Li Hanxiang, Hu was given a chance to direct his first film solo in *Dadi ernü* (*Sons of the Good Earth*, 1964), a war film set during the War of Resistance to Japan from 1937–1945. Hu wrote the script and played the part of a resistance leader who dies a heroic death while liberating an occupied village. The guerrilla leader (the only heroic role Hu ever played as an actor) mobilises the peasants in a nationalistic struggle against the Japanese.

The character impresses with his forbearance and endurance, and in one scene, strikes a pose resembling Guan Di, the Chinese God of Warriors, and, in his human persona Guan Yu, one of the heroic characters in the classic novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Having suffered an injury in one arm, Hu 'calmly dishes out commands, while his wound is being attended to, as if he were in a Beijing teahouse.'[2] As the doctor operates on his wound, the commander is calmly reading a book held in his good arm, an image that stresses both the civilian (*wen*) and military (*wu*) lineages of the Chinese classical hero. Traditionally, *wen* and *wu* are seen as desirable traits of the ideal man, and their relationship 'has long been perceived as dichotomous and ubiquitous (within the Chinese domain) and has been consistently referred to in relation to national government and personal self-cultivation', as Louie and Edwards tell us.[3]

In this early directorial effort, by stressing *wen* and *wu* as fundamental concepts, Hu was already in the throes of self-fashioning through a role-playing position. He saw himself not only as a warrior-hero but also a scholar-hero, an important division of the *xia* personality that he would later explore in greater depth in *A Touch of Zen*. Hu himself describes it this way:

> No matter on the stage or at the worship altar, Guan's image is nearly always the same; his body wearing a suit of armour, one side of his body draped with a green military robe, one hand fingering his beard, the other hand holding the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.[4]

Like the mythic Guan Di, Hu's commander evokes the image of the literary hero who resorts to force of arms to defend a cause. This role playing of Guan Di in *Sons of the Good Earth* is indicative of Hu's development as a *wuxia* director and his self-fashioning of *xia* identity. However, Hu changed his focus from the masculine hero-image of Guan Di to the feminine hero-image of the female knight-errant. I will go on to show below how he accomplished that change in his development as a director of *wuxia* films.

Come Drink With Me is a seminal interjection in the genre. Though it was Hu's first *wuxia* film, it already demonstrates the director's singular reworking of *wuxia* conventions and themes that would establish his critical reputation and make him a master of the genre. That the film is usually regarded as a transitional work in Hu's career hinges first, on its status as a Shaw Brothers studio movie (the premise here is that Hu could not have made a self-fashioning movie because the studio imposed its own house-style and thus was a force outside Hu's control), and second, that the movie straddled the 'old school' which emphasised fantasy and special effects and the 'new school' which depicted violence realistically.

In the section below, I will analyse *Come Drink With Me* to demonstrate that it is the first cohesive work in Hu's self-fashioning project in the genre and that it is a precursor of some of the themes and motifs that Hu would later develop in *Dragon Inn* and *A Touch of Zen*. Its commercial success helped to establish the female knight-errant figure more firmly as a standard protagonist of new school *wuxia* movies and it of course boosted Hu's reputation and confidence, paving the way for him to advance his career in Taiwan to make *Dragon Inn* and *A Touch of Zen*, the latter film being his masterpiece and the acme of the new school, indeed perhaps even its culmination.

Come Drink With Me as the Seminal New School *Wuxia* Film

As the first major film of the new school movement, it is useful to see how *Come Drink With Me* denominates the new school. The film is an amalgam of new school concepts and old school fantasy, demonstrating from the outset that the division between the two schools were not as clear-cut as studio publicists made it out to be. Nevertheless, realistic violence as a designator of new school *wuxia* is immediately displayed in the opening scenes showing an attack on a convoy escorting prisoners to their destination. A man clad in white, Jade-Face Tiger (a flamboyant performance by Chen Honglie), strides forward fearlessly to halt

the convoy, signalling an ambush by the prisoners' mates, members of a bandit gang. What follows are various scenes of violence: protagonists run through with swords, hands hacked off, Jade-Face Tiger thrusting his sword through the throat of the captain. The bandits then capture the magistrate travelling with the convoy, and torture him in their hideout to extract information on where their incarcerated leader is being held. Holding the magistrate hostage and intending to exchange him for their leader, the bandits send a message to the governor, who in turn dispatches the female knight-errant Golden Swallow (Zheng Peipei) to rescue the hostage.

With the premise of realist violence having been demonstrated in the opening, Hu's articulation of action becomes more theatrical in the following tavern sequence. Golden Swallow (Zheng Peipei), is introduced before she enters the tavern, traditionally a meeting point of the *jianghu*. A clap of lightning and sound of thunder signal that it is a place of dark mystery and danger, a world beyond the real world. Upon entering this world, Golden Swallow is at first misidentified as a male interloper by the outlaws sent to intercept her. This image of the female knight-errant in male garb will become generic, setting the pattern of all the subsequent female knights-errant who appear on screen, but it is the first important indicator of the inverted sexual relationship in the *wen–wu* dichotomy wherein a woman, in order to be seen to have the attributes of *wen* and *wu* applied to her self, must first be transformed into a man.[5]

Golden Swallow sits on a table ordering wine and food, and is successively harassed by the bad guys. Jugs of wine are thrown at her, coins are fired as missiles, and finally swords are drawn – all attacks which she obstructs with ease. These scenes are carefully choreographed to accentuate not so much realism as a sense of preternatural strength endowing Golden Swallow. Thus, although the action sequences adhere to realism in the opening scenes, Hu appears to undermine realism in the action of the tavern scenes.

Already in *Come Drink With Me*, Hu was working towards his own method of interpreting 'realism' with a stylised kind of fight convention. The intent is to show the female knight-errant in her element in the world of the *jianghu*, the environment where heroic knights-errant display their skills and courage and signal the purpose of their being, which is to eliminate evildoers. At the same time, the tavern sequences are staged with attention to characterisations and a keen sense of atmosphere, demonstrating Hu's intimacy with the décor and lifestyle of traditional Chinese inns. Hu would reprise the inn setting as a concretisation of the abstract *jianghu* in *Dragon Inn* (1967), *Nu* (*Anger*, 1970, his segment in the multi-episodic *Xi Nu Ai Le/The Four Moods*), and *Yingchun ge zhi fengbo* (*The Fate of Lee Khan*, 1973). The inn would also become a favourite *jianghu* setting in many subsequent *wuxia* films produced by Shaw Brothers, most notably *Heidian* (*The Black Tavern*, 1972), directed by Ye

Rongzu, a film with discernible Hu influences (in fact, it can be seen as an expansion of *Anger* and *Dragon Inn*).

The tavern sequence also introduces the male hero of the film, the drunkard beggar Fan Dabei (played by Yue Hua). Fan is shown to possess the kind of *qi*-projection power from the palm normally seen in the *shenguai* tradition of Cantonese martial arts serials, as in *Buddha's Palm*. He has the power of healing which he uses to save Golden Swallow when she is later injured by Jade-Face Tiger during an incursion into the bandits' hideout. As he nurses her to recovery, Fan renews his supernatural *qigong* (technique of *qi*) to prepare himself for the impending battle between him and his ultimate enemy, an apostate monk named Liao Kong (Yang Zhiqing) who seeks the whereabouts of Fan. Liao Kong and Fan were once fellow disciples in the same school but the monk has murdered their master in order to possess a bamboo staff so that he can use its authority to dominate the world of the martial arts. The bamboo staff is now in Fan's possession.

The narrative resorts to the cliché of a vendetta between two disciples from the same school, reiterating the theme of revenge normally found in old school *wuxia* fiction. The Buddhist subject which is an element in the genre is apparent in Liao Kong's status as a monk, but made more substantial in the symbolism of the master's bamboo staff which Liao Kong demands the right to own. Only Fan can confront Liao Kong (who has fallen in with the bandits) since he has the same supernatural martial arts abilities. Hu resorts to various kinds of old school fantasy conventions to depict the final struggle of the two men: their ability to move faster than light, to project energy streams from the palm, the monk's apparent invincibility to opponents' swords and his ability to split solid matter with the touch of the hand. This fantasy plane of combat is held to be the antithesis of the realism of the new school but is displayed in *Come Drink With Me* with enthusiasm. Y. W. Ma states that the focus on the supernatural in traditional knight-errant fiction leaves 'hardly any room for the chivalric idealization of fighting as the finest secular endeavour of the knightly class', which is a fair point to bear in mind when judging Fan Dabei's rivalry with Liao Kong.[6] The rivalry of the two men is really a personal one and there is no chivalric quality in their conflict

The film's unevenness of tone – a first half of artful characterisations distinguished by the folksy atmosphere of the tavern scenes and a second half reprising *shenguai* conventions heralded by the arrival of the monk Liao Kong and his conflict with Fan Dabei – attracted criticism at the time. In an article published in *Mingbao* in 1968, the academic and critic Tang Wenbiao claimed that *Come Drink With Me* was only 'half an achievement'. The first half, he asserted, was the most creative and successful part of the film while the second half fell 'into the rut of the currently popular semi-fantasy *wuxia* novel'.[7] Tang's view was shared by fellow academic Joseph Lau Shiu-ming, who was similarly

disappointed by the film's descent into martial arts fantasy in the final combat scenes between Fan Dabei and Liao Kong, describing them as 'showing off illusion' and being no better than those normally found in Cantonese *shenguai wuxia* serials.[8]

Though Tang and Lau appear to censure the film for having one foot immersed in *shenguai wuxia* conventions and the other foot in presenting innovative and realistic details of characters and action, it is for this reason that *Come Drink With Me* is, in my view, significant. In the historical context of the mid-1960s when the new school was resurgent while the old school was viewed as redundant, *Come Drink With Me* is an example of how the genre underscores the continuity between the past and the present. Tang and Lau's view that *Come Drink With Me* is partly immersed in the old school *wuxia* fantasy is correct inasmuch as the Mandarin new school *wuxia* pictures actually had deep roots in the traditional genre.

The story of *Come Drink With Me* was based on an opera *Jiu gai* (*The Drunkard Beggar*) that Hu had remembered watching from his childhood days in Beijing. The novelist Huanzhu Louzhu ('Master of the Pavilion of the Returned Pearl': the *nom de plume* of Li Shoumin) wrote the opera in the 1920s.[9] Hu had reminisced about how, as a boy growing up in Beijing, he was attracted to Huanzhu's novels whose heroes he described as 'sword-wielding immortals' (*jianxian*) implying that the heroes were invested with a degree of magic and fantasy.[10] Hu acknowledged that the narrative of *Come Drink With Me* bore resemblances to the mythic folklore of the world created by Huanzhu Louzhu. Indeed, the drunkard beggar of *Come Drink With Me* is not unlike a *jianxian*.

However, the greater inspiration for Hu was the opera *The Drunkard Beggar*, which featured Ye Shengzhang, an actor famous for his performances of martial arts slapstick as an opera clown. Hu claimed that he had seen many of Ye's operas as a boy, and the film's conception probably stemmed from Hu's own childhood impressions of the opera.[11] The influence of opera is most evident in Hu's treatment of action. Hu stressed that he was not into 'real fighting', pointing out that the action sequences in his films did not come from kung fu, but from the combat style of Beijing Opera.[12] This had no direct parallels with Hollywood or even the Japanese samurai pictures that were a direct influence on the film. Hu defined traditional opera as 'a synthesis of dance, song, and drama',[13] and he added cinema into the mix.

The idiosyncrasy of the synthesis may perhaps best be grasped as *cinema opera*,[14] referring specifically to the adaptation of opera music and stage acrobatic techniques modulated and transformed by cinematic techniques of analytical editing and *mise en scène*. Hector Rodriguez points out that 'King Hu's encounter with Chinese operatic materials and conventions is not always literal but filtered through a sense of the constraints and possibilities integral to the medium of film and to the modernist sensibilities of the international art

cinema. The result is a self-conscious search for specifically cinematic equivalents for the artistic concerns of Beijing opera'.[15] In other words, the medium of film and its practices of editing and *mise en scène* determine the nature of the synthesis.[16] David Bordwell describes Hu's mastery of film as an 'imperfect' model but he nevertheless praises Hu's style as a source of vast richness.[17] It is perhaps startling that Hu showed such mastery quite early on in *Come Drink With Me*, and that the synthesis of cinema and opera, unique then and still unique now, was a modernist sensibility. *Come Drink With Me* is in effect a modernist film, perhaps the only example of such in the Hong Kong cinema of the period.

The incorporation of Beijing Opera acrobatics made choreography a required aesthetic in Hu's action sequences, which is the first sign of its modernity. Action becomes a matter of choreographing space as well as the actors. The tavern sequence was a preliminary but still impressive example of how Hu integrated choreographic action with the limited spatial elements of his set. Hu always stressed that he knew nothing about the martial arts, and that he achieved his effects through a combination of opera and cinematic techniques. His key collaborator was Han Yingjie. As a performer trained in Beijing Opera, Han choreographed the action sequences according to the beat of Beijing Opera and introduced innovative ways of displaying action as dance. The choreographic style and the use of an action choreographer was a precedent that would be followed by other directors. Hu often claimed that he was the first director to introduce the credit of 'martial arts director' and that Han was the first person to fill that credit.

The motif of choreographed violence somehow complemented the new school's adherence to realism. Hu's borrowings from *shenguai wuxia* appear to contradict the realism line but the acid test of realism in Hu's films is that of human mortality, exemplified in the clash between Fan Dabei and Liao Kong, both of whom possess supernatural powers. Fan Dabei kills Liao Kong by thrusting the bamboo pole into the latter's heart and on withdrawing the pole, a stream of Liao Kong's blood spurts out onto Fan's face. This reveals Liao Kong to be a mere mortal instead of being an enlightened immortal. His 'supernaturalism' is therefore a bogus indicator of the character of the knight-errant. Fan Dabei's final confrontation with Liao Kong is a struggle of moral dimensions, a struggle repeated in *A Touch of Zen* where the Zen patriarch Hui Yuan (Roy Chiao) confronts the villain Xu Xianchun (Han Yingjie) in the climactic combat scenes. Xu Xianchun stabs Hui Yuan, but the discharge of Hui Yuan's wound is a stream of liquid gold. The implication here is that Hui Yuan has achieved Buddhahood. Both final conflicts in *Come Drink With Me* and *A Touch of Zen* are tinged with Buddhist imagery and Zen philosophy, which may be considered radical for its blending of violence, metaphysics, religion and supernaturalism.

A Touch of Zen is notable for its central portrayal of the female knight-errant as an instrument of Zen recognition, the mystical centre of moral self-fashioning. We should now turn to the figure of the female knight-errant and her manifestation of identity in *Come Drink With Me*. Although the film nominally belongs to the male hero Fan Dabei, the most memorable character of the film is in fact Golden Swallow, played by Zheng Peipei. Hu depicts Golden Swallow as a stalwart knight-errant who does not have the moral ambiguity of Fan Dabei. As such, the character works as a conventional knight-heroine who seeks to uphold justice and preserve the law, which are conventional virtues of knight-errantry, but unlike many of the heroines of knight-errant fiction, e.g. the Tang *chuanqi* tales which customarily present female knights-errant as magical figures, Golden Swallow is not seen to be a supernatural fighter dependent on magical techniques. She cannot fly, or appear and disappear at will. She is, however, a formidable swordswoman.

In *Come Drink With Me,* Hu gave the female knight-errant further qualities that made her fresh in the eyes of the audience. Zheng's Golden Swallow displays traits of youthful radiance and vitality. Though a warrior, she never loses her feminine side even when disguised as a male, and it is this distinctive femininity that merits attention. Hu was really transposing the figure of Thirteenth Sister from *A Tale of Heroic Lovers* to the cinema: Thirteenth Sister being the most familiar and popular of the female knight-errant figures in Chinese literature with which Shaw Brothers had a previous association in terms of a film version of the novel, in 1959. At this point, a brief examination of the novel is necessary to appreciate Hu's conception and construction of the female knight-errant figure as a historicist-literary model transposed into the cinema.

Wen Kang's original late Qing novel tells of a heroine named Shisanmei (literally Thirteenth Sister) who saves the lives of the young scholar An Ji and a family of itinerants, the young girl Zhang Jinfeng and her parents, in the Nengren Temple where they have all been captured by errant monks. Thirteenth Sister arranges for the safe conduct of the travellers to their destination, first by brokering a marriage between An Ji and Zhang Jinfeng, since as tradition dictates, they may not travel together without being seen as man and wife. An Ji safely arrives at his destination to redeem his father, An Xuehai, a virtuous official falsely imprisoned, with a treasure of silver ingots. The novel then focuses on An Xuehai's efforts to meet Thirteenth Sister, uncovering her real identity (she is the daughter of a friend, another virtuous official framed by a corrupt minister and put to death thereby resulting in the forced exile of Thirteenth Sister and her mother and the girl's vow to avenge her father's death), and arranging her marriage to An Ji as his second wife. Thereafter, the rest of the novel (roughly half of it) deals with 'the domestic life of the An family and . . . is of little interest', as James Liu has put it.[18]

In a study of early Qing literature where women are featured as warriors and knights-errant, Wai-Yee Li refers to the 'heroic transformation' of women where the literature typically transforms conventional women into heroes.[19] *A Tale of Heroic Lovers* happens also to reverse the transformation. As the only child, Thirteenth Sister was brought up as a boy and taught the martial arts to prepare for the very contingency of exacting revenge on behalf of her father. In the second half of the novel, she 'transforms' from a female knight-errant displaying masculine attributes into a conventional feminine woman and deferential second wife to a scholar-official. Thirteenth Sister's transformation is often seen as a 'disappointment' in the general expectations of the female knight-errant figure when faced with the text of the novel, which suggests that 'the work may harbor designs other than the simple celebration of a heroine's martial deeds'.[20] Indeed, the dichotomy may have engendered misperceptions of the figure particularly over the gender question of masculinity and femininity as represented in the cinema.

The female knight-errant is seen as a 'spillover' of the excessive masculinity in the Hong Kong cinema, as Kwai-cheung Lo has described it.[21] In this view, the female knight-errant retains certain masculine attributes. After the rescue of Zhang Jinfeng, there is a scene of both women relieving themselves. Thirteenth Sister relieves herself in male fashion standing up, while Jinfeng relieves herself squatting over a bowl, an image which must have exercised some psychological impact on Thirteenth Sister's self-fashioning, thereafter necessitating adjustments to her masculinity. Though a more conservative feminine figure at the end of the novel, Thirteenth Sister stems from 'a long tradition in China regarding women cast for unconventional roles: women as knights-errant, women as courtesans, and women disguised as men'.[22] The masculinity of the female knight-errant is always counterpointed by femininity as I will attempt to show in my analysis of *A Touch of Zen* below.

Maram Epstein states that the masculinity of Thirteenth Sister is essentially 'a masculinist solution to the breakdown of elite society',[23] but once the solution is accomplished, Thirteenth Sister must transform back to her feminine role in society. The female knight-errant is a composite of 'both virtuous outlaw and chaste beauty' and the figure, as depicted in *A Tale of Heroic Lovers*, marks

> a new height in the literary trend of constructing girls as the bearers and preservers of Confucian culture, even as they defy the conventional ritual behaviours that defined women's proper social roles, and of depicting the male protagonists as either somehow lacking or disenfranchised.[24]

Shaws' film version *Heroine* showed only the heroic (masculine) persona of Thirteenth Sister, neglecting the romantic, feminine side.[25] Golden Swallow in *Come Drink With Me* is a reconfiguration of the heroic persona of Thirteenth

Sister, particularly in her youthful freshness, moral steadfastness and her innate skill as a warrior, crossing attributes of masculinity and femininity. Like Thirteenth Sister, Golden Swallow wears trousers in battle. They also wear dresses later – Golden Swallow, doing so strategically in the scene where she goes to the temple lair of the bandits posing as a girl going to pray.

Golden Swallow, however, does not quite follow through with the transformation of the female knight-errant 'from unconventional female knight-errant to perfect traditional woman'.[26] Hu would explore the two sides of the female knight-errant in *A Touch of Zen*, a much more complex and mature work, obviously, than *Come Drink With Me*. In the figure of Golden Swallow, it suffices to see her as a prototype that breaks the conservative mould of the traditional woman which tended to sustain the portrayals of the female sex in the Hong Kong Mandarin cinema.

The view of *Come Drink With Me* as a transitional work is justified inasmuch as its female knight-errant is still an incomplete model. One might say that Golden Swallow represents a modernist proto-feminist representation but the dialectic of the traditional woman was not played out. This missing dialectic in the portrayal of the female knight-errant would of course be tackled in its full metaphysical and epistemological weight in *A Touch of Zen*.

Dragon Inn: Breakthrough in Taiwan

Due to his unhappiness with Shaws, King Hu was making plans to leave the studio and was already negotiating with Zhang Taoran, the Hong Kong representative of Taiwan's Union Film Company to join Union and continue directing films. The talks with Zhang led to Hu signing a contract with Union to make his next picture in Taiwan.[27] According to a recently published book on the Taiwan cinema by the Mainland Chinese critic Song Ziwen, Hu had wanted to make another *wuxia* film based on a short story, 'Huapi' ('The Painted Skin'), from the *Liaozhai* anthology but had fallen foul of the censorship system in Taiwan, which took exception to the *shenguai* elements and the political allegory inherent in the original tale.[28]

It should be remembered at this point that *shenguai wuxia* was still a proscribed genre under the GMD rule imposed on Taiwan though in fact a few *wuxia* films were made and released in Taiwan in the Taiwanese dialect film industry in the 1960s. Hu dropped his proposed film, which in fact he later filmed in 1992 as *Huapi zhi yinyang fawang* (*The Painted Skin*) (it was Hu's last film), and resubmitted another script, accentuating historical realism and the kind of allegory against anti-authoritarian tyranny that fitted in more with the GMD regime and its political struggle with the CCP. This new project was *Dragon Inn*, which launched the *wuxia* genre anew in Taiwan, at least in the Mandarin cinema.

In signing with Union, Hu maintained that he had completed his contract with Shaws, but in the wake of the success of *Come Drink With Me*, Shaws maintained that he still owed them several films. In Shaws' eyes, Hu had broken his contract. When *Dragon Inn* turned out to be an even bigger success (the film broke the box-office record for Chinese films, earning over HK$2 million in Hong Kong alone), it was Shaws that finally profited. *Dragon Inn* was actually distributed by Shaws in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia as a result of Union having sold the overseas rights to Shaws to settle the dispute over Hu's contract.[29]

The Union Film Company had started life in Taiwan in 1953 as a film distribution business. The Shanghai entrepreneurs behind Union, among whom was Sha Yung-fong (who made his fortune in the textile industry), planned to set up an independent production company within the private sector. Mandarin film production in Taiwan was virtually controlled by the GMD government-in-exile, which had set up the only film studios on the island. In 1963, with investment from the Singapore-based Cathay Organisation, Union co-founded the Grand Motion Picture Company, a brainchild of director Li Hanxiang who had left Shaw Brothers with grandiose plans to build his own studio. Like King Hu after him, Li was disillusioned with Shaws and sought artistic independence in Taiwan. However, his dream ended in financial disaster. Li's partnership with Union was dissolved in 1966. At the same time, Union's other partner, the Cathay Organisation, was in disarray following the death of its chief executive Loke Wan Tho. Cathay's production arm in Hong Kong began to decline, unable to withstand the competitive onslaught of the Shaw Brothers Studio. All these circumstances led Union to embark on its own productions.[30] The company hired King Hu as production chief, responsible for training new talent and buying equipment to facilitate the studio's operations.[31]

Union was established on the production of *Dragon Inn*. Its success made the *wuxia* genre a staple of the studio – another instance of how the genre fostered the economic conditions for film studios to thrive and survive in the history of Chinese cinema. Hu's contributions in bringing about these conditions cannot be understated. Just as Zhang Che established the general principles of Shaw Brothers' martial arts house style, namely the masculine emphasis (*yang gang*) and a hard-boiled school of violence, Hu also established the principles of Union's house style. Because of Hu's fascination with the Ming dynastic period, Union's *wuxia* films were invariably set in the same period (or a close equivalent, the Song).

This historical emphasis resulted in recurring themes such as the threat of invasion by foreign hordes, the prevalence of domestic strife, the struggle against corrupt officials, male and female knights-errant fighting and dying for their country, as seen in *Tie niangzi* (*Iron Petticoat*, 1969), Hu's own *A Touch of Zen*, *Liehuo* (*The Grand Passion*, 1970), *Longcheng shiri* (*A City Called*

Dragon, 1970). Based on these themes, Union's *wuxia* films acquired a nationalistic vein that sat comfortably with the ideology of the GMD government-in-exile. In fact, in subsequent Union productions, the genre is absorbed into the mainstream state ideology, functioning more or less as allegories of the conflict between the GMD and the Chinese Communist Party.

The plot of *Dragon Inn* opens with a narration that introduces the setting (mid-fifteenth century, Ming dynasty) and explains the rise to power of the eunuchs who control two departments of state: the *dongchang* ('eastern agency', the emperor's secret service) and the *jinyiwei* (the imperial guards). The minister of war, Yu Qian, is executed on the order of the eunuch Cao Shaoqin (played by Bai Ying), head of the *dongchang*. The narration in the prologue of *Dragon Inn* implies a modern allegory of freedom forces fighting against an authoritarian government. Yu Qian is the symbol of the former, his crime being his opposition to the eunuchs, who symbolise the latter.

In the film, Yu Qian's three children are banished to the Dragon Gate, a military outpost on the northern frontier guarded by government troops.[32] To avoid being hounded in later years by Yu's children who will seek to take revenge on him, Cao Shaoqin sends his minions from the *dongchang* to assassinate the children as they go on their journey to exile, but a lone swordsman intervenes to save the children. Cao then dispatches his troops, led by Captain Pi Shaotang (Miao Tian), to occupy the Dragon Gate Inn so as to intercept the children and kill them there. Forces loyal to Yu send their own people to protect and defend the children. The loyalists are Yu's former chief-of-staff Wu Ning (Cao Jian) who poses as the innkeeper, a male knight-errant Xiao Shaozi (Shi Jun), a young female knight-errant Zhu Hui (Shangguan Lingfeng), and her brother Zhu Ji (Xue Han), who had earlier appeared to save the children.

The narrative proceeds as a series of set pieces showing the separate arrivals of the chief protagonists to Dragon Gate Inn and the various situations of combat showing how the individuals loyal to Yu Qian fend off the enemy's tactics of intimidation (in particular, pouring poison into the wine drunk by Xiao Shaozi and the Zhu siblings). These set pieces unfold seemingly without a story to thread them together. Tang Wenbiao states that the film is suggestive of the anti-narrative structures of French new wave master Jean-Luc Godard,[33] yet another sign of Hu's modernity. The fragmented nature of Hu's narrative, as well as the hierarchal nature marking the shifts in key of the action set pieces, is really a symptom of the director's operatic style. As Vicki Ooi has explained,

> the fight sequence in a Beijing Opera is a set piece – a scene carried on a major battle or tournament. And the climax of the battle, and of the play, is formed by a series of dazzling set pieces, each in turn more complex and densely constructed than its predecessor.[34]

Dragon Inn was the first film in which Hu properly inducted Beijing Opera into his cinematic style. The operatic style is signalled in the opening scenes where Hu introduces his chief villains, the eunuchs of the *dongchang*, who appear on screen moving to the stately rhythms and beat of traditional opera music (the effect of stage entrances that Hu defined as an important characteristic of traditional opera). This prologue in the film is followed by the sequence of the lone swordsman Zhu Ji, facing off the agents of the *dongchang* as they carry out their orders to kill Yu's children. The advance of Zhu Ji is choreographed according to the accented beat of the *ban* (wooden board) that typically recurs in Beijing Opera.

Variations of this basic choreographic style are seen in later action sequences set around the Dragon Gate Inn, particularly in those scenes where Zhu Hui, the young swordswoman is matched against Mao Zongxian, one of the *dongchang* commanders (played by Han Yingjie, also the film's martial arts choreographer), and in the following scene where Xiao Shaozi fights his way out of an encirclement of Mao's soldiers. In these scenes, the movements and gestures are synchronised with the opera beat, resulting in awkward pauses where the opponents eye each other as much as they actually fight. The pauses also seem to suggest that the protagonists are carefully trying to balance themselves from the burden of carrying heavy swords. When Xiao Shaozi fights his way out of the encirclement, the movements of the protagonists suggest crabs scuttling about on the sand, which is an apt description of the operatic effect that generally distinguishes the action scenes.

One symptom of Hu's incorporation of Beijing Opera characteristics into his cinema is the feeling that his characters come across as stock theatrical types rather than as true-to-life human beings caught in a human struggle. The action set pieces are entertaining vignettes in their own right, affording Hu opportunities to delve into themes of deception, subterfuge and strategy, but often they don't seem necessary for the plot. The near-whimsical sense of stratagem in the Dragon Gate Inn sequences where characters test out their fighting skills before a great battle, already evident in *Come Drink With Me*, is a sign of Hu's propensity for action almost for its own sake. The inn sequences unfold here in a more relaxed pace, since much of the film's action revolves around the tavern setting. The set pieces carry a sense of the exaltation of battle. Hu celebrates his interest in military strategy, indulging in the classical device of *jiguan* (laying booby traps) by turning the inn into an ingenious death-trap. This interest in strategy and battle tactics remains a motif in all of Hu's *wuxia* films.

This should not suggest that Hu is only concerned with superficial elements of opera and *wuxia*. Hu's intermingling of opera with *wuxia* is a remarkable enough feat in itself, but in translating operatic characteristics to cinema, Hu found the most economical means to express the director's 'meaning', as he put it. How did opera express his meaning? Vicki Ooi suggests that the most

prominent and significant Beijing Opera technique King Hu uses is the fight convention. Ooi writes:

> In the Beijing Opera the martial prowess of the protagonist is almost the measure of his moral achievement. This moral dimension is dramatised and reflected by the ascending hierarchical order in which the hero fights his opponents – each opponent being stronger and more villainous than the preceding one. And the hero's final victory usually symbolises the triumph of good over evil. The few exceptions to this rule are when the hero is defeated not because of the inadequacy of his strength, physical and moral, but because of the duplicity and the cunning machinations set in force by an evil or corrupt official of his own side.[35]

According to Ooi's interpretation, the power of the chivalric hero is only as great as his moral achievement. In *Dragon Inn*, the heroes fight for the cause of a just minister against the forces of totalitarian power. They prevail but the sacrifice is great. But how does one determine the moral dimension of violence? The answer lies in Hu's characterisations. Matched against the eunuch Cao Shaoqin, who represents militaristic totalitarian power, are scholar types represented by Wu Ning, Yu Qian's chief-of-staff. Wu's civil manner belies the violence of the fight convention that Hu revels in. For example, he frees the wounded prisoners captured by his own side, and his statesmanlike character impresses two other prisoners, a pair of Tartar brothers who defect to their side after revealing their sorrows to a sympathetic Wu. In this characterisation of Wu, Hu suggests a certain harmony between *wen* and *wu* values. This kind of harmony becomes a political means towards achieving a just, balanced, society.

The villain Cao Shaoqin is seen as a man who relies totally on violence or military means (*wu*), thus he is someone who is against the harmony of nature. The fact that he is a eunuch reinforces his unnatural presence.[36] Cao Shaoqin is described by the Tartar brothers as being the fastest and most accurate of swordsmen. To defeat him requires the combined skills of the best swordsmen that the loyalist side can muster. The battle sequence at the end of the film is the first of the great climactic battles in Hu's *wuxia* films, and demonstrates Hu's technical bravado, from the head-on collision between the forces of good and evil, and from the symbolism of specific actions that transform these last great battles into allegorical treatments of China's modern history.

Cao's opponents make fun of his castrated sexuality. These taunts are designed to provoke Cao, so as to worsen his asthmatic condition and weaken his fighting abilities. At a crucial moment in the battle, Cao cuts down a withered tree to use as a picket against his opponents. This action becomes highly personal as signalled by the shots of Cao's emotive considerations of the tree before he actually cuts it down, the withered tree signifying his own emotional

state and physical corruption. At the same time, the physical exertion of cutting down the tree also signifies his self-denial and his defiance of nature. Trees would later recur in Hu's subsequent films, as Yeh and Davis point out, where they are used more as props from which his protagonists jump down as part of the imagery of choreographic action.[37]

Finally, from the descriptions of the film's narrative above, it will be seen that the figure of the female knight-errant is not as prominent as in *Come Drink With Me*, though in fact, *Dragon Inn* made a star out of Shangguan Lingfeng, still a teenager at the time. As with Zheng Peipei in *Come Drink With Me*, Shangguan is emblematic of a refreshing, determined and committed (as well as patriotic) warrior whose fighting ability is equal to that of the men. However, the film is far more about strategy than actual physical skill, and it emphasises team work though there is a bias towards the male knight-errant figure Xiao Shaozi (Shi Jun) who is depicted as a true *youxia*, a roving swordsman or wandering knight. He is introduced literally wandering into the Dragon Gate Inn.

Zhu Hui, the female knight-errant played by Shangguan, shows her individuality as an adept fighter. The female knight-errant in *Dragon Inn* is every inch a woman of action, and like Golden Swallow, she is first seen dressed as a male fighter, and appears in that fashion throughout the film. In this sense, there is not much complexity to her character, her sex only slightly worrying to Xiao Shaozi, who in a few scenes shows a hint of concern towards her but then quickly focuses on the action at hand. There is no room for emotion in action, a condition which the female knight-errant must fulfil. This emerges as a theme in *Dragon Inn* and which Hu will enlarge upon in *A Touch of Zen* vis-à-vis the central figure of the female knight-errant in that film.

The female knight-errant is not the centre of attention in *Dragon Inn*. Rather, she fits seamlessly into the company of men, and, if not an indispensable presence is certainly reliable and trustworthy. Her significance lies in providing a feminine presence, albeit dressed in male attire, amid the hyper-masculinity of *wuxia* male culture. In *Dragon Inn*, Hu shows the female knight-errant becoming a fixture in the chessboard of battle, which would otherwise be a male domain, and her absence would be a loss. Thereafter, in all of Hu's *wuxia* films, the female knight-errant was always present, and in *A Touch of Zen* she would occupy the centre.

A Touch of Zen and the Moral Dilemma of the Female Knight-Errant

A Touch of Zen brings us to the idea of the genre as a romantic quest. The quest is personified by the figure of the female knight-errant who dominates the film inasmuch as the film is titled after her in Chinese, 'Xianü', taken from the original story contained in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*. The term means chivalrous

or heroic lady but is often taken simply to mean a female knight-errant, a terminology more correctly rendered as *nüxia*. The word *xia* in *xianü* is therefore used as an adjective conferring a chivalrous, magnanimous or gallant, and martial quality on the female character. The word *nü* in *nüxia* qualifies the gender of *xia*, a figure which is otherwise gender-free but which now is identified as female.

Though the two terms are interchangeable to a degree, there is a difference in emphasis. The difference can be decisive, since a knight-errant can be female but she may not necessarily be chivalrous, somehow lacking in the requisite ethical character of *xia*. The quest of the female knight-errant is therefore that of *xia*, or the real value of chivalry. Related to that is the quest for revenge which is the more immediate narrative matter at hand for the *xianü*.[38] I wish here to emphasise the abstract meaning of *xia* denoting chivalry because like many of the *wuxia* films which include female knights-errant as protagonists, *A Touch of Zen* is complicated by its representation of the quest in terms of a discrepancy between the real value of chivalry and the role of gender. In other words, the films often highlight the question of the compatibility of the female gender and knight-errantry, a theme long established in the literary representation of the female knight-errant, as exemplified by the classic novel *A Tale of Heroic Lovers*. There, Thirteenth Sister, a female knight-errant seeking revenge for the death of her father, finally gives up knight-errantry to concentrate on becoming a dutiful wife.

In *A Touch of Zen*, the female knight-errant functions as an emblematic field of discourse signifying the director's probing into *wuxia* ideals and the nature of heroism. He alludes to the relationship between civil values (*wen*) and martial values (*wu*) as the most desirable traits of the ideal hero. As part of the discourse on *wen–wu* values, there is the related question of gender, of masculinity and femininity. I have characterised this as the discrepancy of the value of chivalry and the value of gender. However, putting aside for the moment the question of gender, Hu focuses on the basic question of knight-errantry and its moral conduct. Are *wen* and *wu* the only desirable traits, or must we go deeper into the metaphysical world to search for inner truths and experiences? How does one put one's ideals and knowledge of good and evil to the practical use of upholding justice, and how is violence justified? What indeed is the highest state of knight-errantry? These then are the narrative themes of the film.

A Touch of Zen is also Hu's most ambitious work on the level of self-fashioning. The female knight-errant represents Hu's 'submission to narrativity', as Greenblatt describes the process of a character's role-playing within the realm of narrative self-fashioning.[39] This implies that the figure of the female knight-errant is captive to narrative historicism, a movement that sees the figure transposed from literature to the cinema wherein the female knight-errant is the narrator (or implied narrator) of her own tale. Ultimately, in Hu's vision, the

tale ends in an intuitive interjection that he called 'A Touch of Zen'. Zen (the Japanese term for the Chinese word Chan which I will stick to because it is already institutionalised within the English title of the film) while superficially representing the kind of 'didactic intention to show a vision of causal relations in human affairs' traditionally adopted by Chinese storytellers,[40] is seen here as an improvisation in the act of self-fashioning within the film text. The process involves 'ceaseless narrative invention' because 'one is not forever fixed in a single, divinely sanctioned identity'.[41]

If role-playing is an idea that shows one's identity is not fixed or divinely sanctioned, Hu suggests that one can only submit to Zen and its improvisational forces. We see the female knight-errant in various guises and roles, at one point pretending to be a ghost, at another point putting on male fashion to convey a secret message to the male protagonist, a poor scholar. Gender and identity are at the service of role-playing such that 'desire and passion (are) allowed to unfold and fully play itself out', but to some higher purpose. This higher purpose is the attainment of Zen enlightenment, which fits into the scheme of Chinese didacticism where an 'external moral vision asserts its control at the end'.[42]

The scholar also has a well-defined role to play. While immersed in the literati class (he ekes out a living as a scribe and painter), his aspiration is to be a heroic *xia* possessing both *wen* and *wu* virtues, like his idol Zhuge Liang, a historical figure renowned as a military strategist and thinker of genius, one of the heroic characters in the classic novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* who is not himself a warrior but who possesses the talent 'to measure the heavens and mete the earth'.[43] The male scholar is a counterfoil to the female knight-errant, and she to him, but they reach different resolutions in character.

The ambition of *A Touch of Zen* is revealed first in Hu's aim of constructing his own vision of the genre to both satisfy and modify the historicist patterns of the *shenguai* and *wuxia* traditions. Thus, he reprised the *shenguai* tradition after the fashion of the ghost story and tales of the fantastic in *Liaozhai zhiyi* but doing so in the awareness that the GMD regime in Taiwan would ban any overt references and display of *shenguai* supernaturalism. Hu re-fashions the material of *Liaozhai* through a series of what I have already called 'improvisations' so as to challenge the supernaturalism of the genre.

Based on the original tale 'Xianü',[44] he 'improvises' a ghost story and turns it into a treatise about the existence of ghosts which is then transmogrified into a mystery with hints of detective or spy fiction in the manner of the *gongan* subgenre. Eventually and finally, the film becomes an action picture in true martial arts fashion, featuring a number of dazzling action sequences in Hu's characteristic, idiosyncratic *cinema opera* style. Throughout all of these different strands, the figure of the female knight-errant is the central unifying force, tying up the elements of the ghost story, the mystery, the political intrigue, the revenge

tale, the romance between the scholar and the beautiful and gallant female knight-errant, and ultimately, the metaphysical exploration of identity and moral enlightenment through a Zen revelation.

The story of *A Touch of Zen* centres on the relationship between a poor scholar Gu Shengzhai (Shi Jun) and a mysterious woman Yang Huizhen (Xu Feng) (in the original story, the 'Xianü' is not named). Their relationship begins when Yang secretly moves into the premises of a ruined castle where Gu lives with his widowed mother. Thinking that the premises may be haunted, Gu at first believes Yang to be a ghost. This illusion is soon dispelled when Gu's mother introduces Yang to her son the next day, hoping that they would become a match. The mother gets close to Yang, intimating that she should marry her son and give her a grandchild, ensuring that the Gu family line will continue. A stranger Ouyang Nian (Tian Peng) appears, at first making acquaintance with Gu by asking him to paint his portrait, but then he snoops around the ruined castle. Encountering the blind fortune-teller Shi (Bai Ying), Ouyang gives Shi a blow to test whether he is genuinely blind. Ouyang then invades Yang Huizhen's quarters in the ruined castle to taunt Yang with questions. Finally, he invades the privacy of Yang and Gu after they have made love. Yang and Ouyang engage each other in a swordfight. Gu then learns that Yang is no ordinary woman and that she is in reality a fugitive on the run, the daughter of a minister disgraced and murdered by the *dongchang*, the secret agency controlled by eunuchs in the imperial court. As Yang and two of her father's cohorts, Generals Lu (Xue Han) and Shi, make their escape (seen in a flashback sequence), they are aided by a Zen patriarch Hui Yuan (Roy Chiao) who stops Ouyang Nian, in fact a *dongchang* agent dispatched to root out the whereabouts of Miss Yang and her followers and arrest them.

Gu throws in his lot with the fugitives. He advises Yang and Shi to attack Ouyang before he liaises with an advance party sent by Men Da, the *dongchang* commander. The attack takes place in a bamboo forest, a sequence which has now become justly famous as one of the most outstanding of *wuxia* battle sequences achieved in the cinema (and which has been copied many times since). Ouyang is mortally wounded but before he dies, he dictates a message to Men Da asking him to stop his advance. Having intercepted the message, Gu sends a fake message telling Men Da to proceed ahead. Using psychological warfare to trick the enemy into thinking that the fugitives' hideout is haunted, Men Da and his men are lured into the ruined castle. Yang and her allies employ an array of trick effects and booby traps, combined with direct assaults, to wipe out the enemy. The morning after the massacre, Gu surveys the scene, at first taking delight in the success of his stratagem, but is later horrified by the sight of the dead and is immediately seized by a concern to find out whether Yang Huizhen is still alive. Hui Yuan and a group of monks appear to bury the bodies. Gu is told that Yang has retreated to the

monastery. The last section of the film concentrates on the desperate battles fought by Xu Xianchun (Han Yingjie), commander of the *jinyiwei* (the imperial guard), to arrest Gu, Yang and Shi. Xu proves to be too strong for Yang and Shi, necessitating the intervention of Hui Yuan. Xu is subdued, but in a final feint, stabs Hui Yuan. This climactic struggle ends in the deaths of Xu and Hui Yuan.

The original *Liaozhai* story depicts the *xianü* as a powerful avenging angel of the night, appearing on earth to save the scholar from a homosexual lover (Ouyang Nian in the film). The lover turns out to be a malevolent fox-spirit, who is then killed by the *xianü*. The *xianü* is free to fulfil her mission, first to give the scholar Gu Shengzhai a child so that his family line can be maintained, and to avenge the death of her father, a minister of war murdered by a political enemy. On completing her last mission, which she had delayed at first because of the need to look after her aged mother and then because of her pregnancy and birth of Gu's baby, she takes her leave, telling Gu that he will not live long, and that his child will achieve success as a scholar and become a high official. She then disappears into thin air in a flash of lightning.

In adapting 'Xianü', Hu expanded the story with new material that filled in the gaps of the female knight-errant's mysterious, supernatural origins. He sought to insert Zen as part of his explanation of the mystery of the female knight-errant, allowing him to stay faithful to the story while accommodating his own interpretations of the persisting enigma of the *xianü*. Why did the *xianü* abandon her child, and where did she go? Most of the legendary female knights-errant in traditional *chuanqi* tales disappear into the void and the *xianü* is no exception, but Hu showed Yang Huizhen abandoning her baby to Gu Shengzhai and then retreating into a Zen monastery in the mountains.

Zen then represents the void but it also goes beyond the void to suggest transcendental redemption. Hu invented the character of the Zen patriarch Hui Yuan as the central figure in the Zen material which would anchor the female knight-errant in her metaphysical realm, but how to introduce and manifest Zen as a metaphysical conceit was a problem Hu never fully resolved in the script, one reason why he took a long time to complete the film (*A Touch of Zen* was released in two instalments, the first in 1970, and the second in 1971: Hu was still shooting the film a few weeks before the second instalment was scheduled to be released). Zen could not be described, only felt and intuited. Any dialogue that attempted to explain Zen would be to rationalise it.

Hu decided to go ahead and 'take a chance', as he put it, by expressing Zen visually.[45] This had never been tried before in a *wuxia* action movie, or indeed in any other genre. In other words, Zen would remain central to the concept of the film as an improvisation rather than as a scripted element of the narrative. Rather, Zen would be gradually introduced through an intricate pattern of motifs in the narrative. Zen gradually becomes the main motif through the

structural inter-relationship between the female knight-errant and the male scholar and their various roles and conflicts. Zen finally becomes a manifestation of human struggle for transcendentalism.

Self-fashioning through Zen

Since any narrative is dependent on the structural need to focus on its lead characters, I will therefore concentrate on Yang Huizhen and Gu Shengzhai, the two chief protagonists of *A Touch of Zen*. The film can virtually be seen from their respective self-fashioned improvisations that are mutually coordinated despite their strongly contrasting personalities and responses to each other. The following analysis will examine the *xia* roles of the two leads. In their respective narratives, Hu sought to reinterpret the notion of *xia* which he defined as a 'form of behaviour' and 'a mode of survival'.[46]

On the outset, Yang Huizhen displays the typical characteristics of *xia* behaviour: she is spare with words, preferring to act rather than speak; she is mindful of her duties and obligations; she lives plainly and works hard. She is also a formidable warrior, a requisite for survival. In the first part of the film, Hu dwells on this figure as a survivor preparing herself for the struggle ahead, such as forging her own weapons in a makeshift foundry. She is positively determined, even fatalistically so, to achieve her end of exacting revenge. In contrast, Gu Shengzhai is not a warrior. He is a poor unmarried scholar with an aging mother to look after, but Gu seeks to become a scholar-*xia* (*ruxia*), in the exemplary fashion of Zhuge Liang who does not fight but yet could use armies.

A Touch of Zen thus contains a critical discourse on the Confucian scholar-*xia* and the female knight-errant as two relative figures of the *xia* type. Hu's manifestation of the scholar-*xia*, in the person of Gu Shengzhai, is a far cry from the machismo of Zhang Che's heroes. Gu combines, in his own awkward way, civilian (*wen*) and military (*wu*) traits, and though not exemplary, offers an alternative role model for the study of male heroism in the *wuxia* film. Gu's failure essentially is his weakness as a warrior. Hence, he is unable to satisfy the *wu* condition, but it is Hu's intention to make us see the weakness of the character as being relative to the strength of the female knight-errant. One's strength is the other's weakness. In the *wu* aspect, it is Gu who is weak and Yang who is strong, but in the *wen* aspect, it is Yang who is weak and Gu who is strong.

However, Gu's weakness as a warrior leads us to question his masculinity. According to Kam Louie and Louise Edwards, the *wen–wu* paradigm constructs masculinity differently from contemporary Western notions of 'macho man'.[47] China had its own tradition of machismo though it was not the predominant mode, as Louie and Edwards point out. The authors identify a 'cerebral male model' as the dominant form of Chinese masculinity.[48] Such a model appears to fit Gu Shengzhai admirably, although as it evolved through time,

cerebrality is seen more as a weakness associated with the *wen* mode and it has moulded Gu's character into a weakling bookworm.

Louie and Edwards tell us that as a result of tension between the *wen* and *wu* modes, successive dynasties from the time of the Tang (618–907) tended to emphasise one trait over the other. In the Song dynasty (960–1279), *wen* gained superiority over *wu*.[49] As Zhang Che saw it, because civility took precedence over the martial,

> we [meaning the Chinese] became weak and fell under the dominion of foreign races [i.e. the Mongols and the Manchus, who respectively established the Yuan and Qing dynasties], and it was thereafter in their interests to destroy the people's martial values and aspirations to become knights-errant.[50]

Gu Shengzhai represents the repressed *wu* male tradition that was passed down from at least the period of the Song dynasty (Hu's film being set in the later Ming dynasty). To the extent that *wu* values had been denigrated, man's nature was softened and indeed degenerated by *wen* values, a thesis clearly enunciated in Pu Songling's original story where the scholar indulges in degenerate pleasure by taking a male lover. Thus, the didactic message of the tale is that the scholar has to be saved from his degenerate nature by the mysterious female knight-errant who appears in the story. In Hu's film, Gu Shengzhai is depicted not so much as a degenerate but as an idealist who does not hanker after material wealth or high position. His idealism is a source of vexation to his mother who berates him for being a 'good for nothing'.

Mother: You're over thirty, poor as a mouse, and can't find a wife.
Gu: I am waiting for the one predestined to me.
Mother: What a poor match that will be when you find your predestined one and have no money!

The mother's comments are very much in the tradition that views learning to be of value only if it can be harnessed to win money, fame and status. Thus a scholar who fails the Civil Service Examination or does not even attempt to sit for one, as in the case of Gu, is a useless scholar. In response, Gu calmly quotes an injunction from Zhuge Liang's *Qian chushi biao* ('A Petition to the Emperor Before the Military Expedition'), 'In times of turbulence, one should preserve one's own life at all costs and not seek fame and achievement through ingratiation with the nobles.' On the wall hangs an inscription also taken from Zhuge: 'In plainness, the will is clear; in calmness, reach to the furthest point.' These quotes have psychologically conditioned Gu to a life of hardship and poverty but more than mere consolation, they encapsulate the values of a scholar-*xia*. These quotes

show Gu's status as a scholar of Chinese literature and culture but they are the first explicit signs of Hu's intention to examine the *wen–wu* dialectic.

When the time comes for battle with the forces of the corrupt eunuchs, Gu surprises us with his military knowledge and foresight. The ineffectual, hapless scholar is transformed into a first-rate military strategist for Yang Huizhen and her loyal supporters. It seems as if the scholar has become a *xia*. But Gu is only playing at being a *xia*. He has conceived his own narrative where he becomes a master strategist using stratagems to defeat the enemy. He runs the risk of being 'swallowed up' by his own story, and hence to cease being himself.[51] As a strategist in his own narrative, Gu devises stratagems that wipe out whole armies in the ensuing battle staged inside a supposedly haunted castle. In the aftermath of the battle, Gu gloats over 'his' victory, laughing triumphantly at the ingeniousness of his stratagems: his use of dummies, booby traps, alarm bells.

The whole idea of role-playing is to rehearse the possibility of the real, but Hu shows that Gu is unable to cope with reality. The narrative he has fashioned is rudely interrupted by scenes of horror when Gu finally sees the corpses strewn all over the battle ground. Being a scholar after all, Gu recoils from the horror since he has no defence mechanism against violence and the moral tribulations that follow. The panic may also be the result of his realisation that he has failed to synthesise his idealism with the reality of involvement. Yang Huizhen's task is to save the scholar from his moral panic and to point him towards the light of Buddha. The appearance of Hui Yuan on the scene of the massacre signals this subject of deliverance. Yang Huizhen embodies the spirit of deliverance, or, the Zen concept of transcendentalism.

Yang's relationship with Gu is ruled by predestiny, a Buddhist notion which has seeped into Chinese thinking as an axiom regulating sexual relations and marriage (*yuanfen*). In this predestined relationship, Yang has her own role to play while Gu conceives the narrative where he becomes Zhuge Liang guiding and turning Yang into a ruthless warrior to fulfil her mission of vengeance. The most striking representation of this guiding role comes during the battle in the haunted castle. Gu suddenly springs up from the darkness to utter an aphorism, 'A woman's soft nature hinders the progress of great affairs', as Yang hesitates to kill an enemy who cries for mercy. This utterance reinforces the illusionary nature of Gu's performance as a scholar-*xia*, foreshadowing the ultimate separation of *wen* and *wu*.

Since Gu is not a warrior and does not do his own killing, he is not bound by any moral scruple that may hold a warrior back from killing an adversary who cries for mercy. Yang kills the soldier, but her hesitancy suggests a repression of a psychic drive, a notion taken from Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory, which sees woman as a subject fulfilling basic biological drives and experiencing *jouissance*.[52] This repression of *jouissance* is the symptom of her feminist struggle within the context of a patriarchal society, but here, in the context of

the utterance, it suggests an improvisation in her narrative self-fashioning, as she is immediately transported to the threshold of a clash of narratives.

I stated that *A Touch of Zen* may be seen from the perspectives of the two principals' self-narratives. It is possible to shift from one perspective to the other so that the film may be seen as a process of Yang's submission to narrative self-fashioning. Yang plays various roles and her narrative self-fashioning spans both the past and the present. Sometimes the sense of the past and the present is blurred in the telling, as in the flashback recounting the tale of her father Yang Lian and his struggle with the eunuchs. In this *mise en abîme*, Yang Huizhen is the daughter who avoids arrest on an imperial decree after her father is murdered and escapes the sentence of death by going into exile escorted by the two loyal generals Shi and Lu. She is given sanctuary by the Zen patriarch Hui Yuan. This narrative of the past segues into the narrative of the present where Yang is now a lady-knight avenger, suggesting that her present role of avenger is a progression of her role as the weak daughter fleeing her father's tormentors. In this present layer, the female knight-errant is the most important role of all the roles Yang has played.

Yang's and Gu's narratives coincide as both become engaged in a *wen–wu* union. In this narrative, Gu acts as Yang's lover and mentor. However, the dialectics of *wen* and *wu* are seen working themselves out as antitheses. Gu functions as a counterbalance to the heroic figure of Yang. Where Gu prevails in *wen* mode, Yang's persona becomes ambiguous. Where Yang prevails in *wu* mode, Gu is very much in the background. Though Gu seeks a harmony between *wen* and *wu*, sometimes invigilating over her conduct as a *xia*, his relationship with Yang shows that there is an ultimate dichotomy between these qualities. At best, the Gu–Yang relationship is ambivalent, illustrating Hu's aim of undercutting our expectations of *wuxia* heroics and the conventional ending where the hero and the heroine are joined in happy union. Yet the connection between them is more than the 'relatedness of diametrical opposites' and is notable for 'their poetic revelation of power, sexuality, and inwardness'.[53]

All narratives come to an end. When Gu offers to help Yang in her struggle, basing this on the fact that they had slept together and were now as husband and wife, Yang rejects this reasoning by saying that their sexual relationship was compelled by 'karmic forces' (*nieyuan*) and that he was no longer obliged to her because the relationship was now ended. She gives birth to Gu's baby and then abandons the baby to his care, having fulfilled her bargain with destiny to save Gu from moral blindness.

This act of giving up her baby is hardly the act of a traditional woman, which I would suggest, strengthens the proposition of Hu's feminist *wuxia* sensibility. The act suggests Kristeva's feminist theory of woman exerting her feminist presence (her physical drives) within the framework of a patrilinear society, entailing a repression of *jouissance* in the name of the Law of the Father.[54] Yang

Huizhen gives up her status as a mother in order to pursue her own drives for spiritual fulfilment. Her sexual pleasure is subordinated to the function of procreation (to provide a son to Gu Shengzhai so that his patrilinear line may continue). *Jouissance* is further repressed to pursue her other desires of killing and revenge. This concept of feminism involves a split, between biological and psychic drives on the one hand and the law of the patriarchy on the other. Yang Huizhen's actions are dependent on the law and she invariably submits to it.

Hence, I come to the penultimate layer of the narrative self-fashioning project. As Hu created Yang Huizhen, his psychological backstory would likely have included speculations and interpretations on why the female knight-errant gave up her baby and vanished into thin air in the original story. The process of self-fashioning would have allowed for an improvisation that Yang Huizhen may be an incarnation of a modern feminist well before her time. In fact, such an improvisation would not be new and may hardly be an improvisation as female knights-errant or supernatural swordswomen are historicist fantasies of wishful thinking through the ages as shown by the literature.

Yang Huizhen reflects both the modern ideas of feminism and the conservative norms of traditional womanhood, precisely the configuration of the character of Thirteenth Sister from *A Tale of Heroic Lovers*. In the original story 'Xianü', the female knight-errant is a mysterious figure who tended to appear out of the void and disappear into it. Of the *xianü* in Pu's story, Karl Kao states that the reader is not privileged to 'know more about her behavior than Gu and his mother'.[55] In his self-fashioning of Yang Huizhen, Hu gave a 'complete' picture of the female knight-errant. This classic transformation of Thirteenth Sister, as projected onto Yang's character, may well perplex modern feminist critics, but to Hu's credit, it is viewed as a historical dialectic which completes the personality of the female knight-errant in the Chinese tradition. Yang Huizhen's deference to Gu is a sign of the conservative Confucian ethos in the film, reflecting the ethos of Chinese society, but it counteracts the philosophy of Buddhist pre-destiny.

The *wen–wu* dichotomy also acts to reinforce the Confucian reverence of the male patriarchy and the superiority of *wen* over *wu*, yet we clearly see in the film the innate inability of *wen* as personified by Gu Shengzhai to assert any kind of effective superiority over Yang Huizhen.[56] As Yang Huizhen goes on to fulfil her karmic destiny, she becomes more and more independent as if detaching herself from a Confucian reality to achieve Buddhist transcendence. Kristeva points out that Buddhism 'was frequently the refuge of women, since unlike Confucianism, it acknowledged – at least theoretically – their equality with men'.[57]

The narrative self-fashioning of the *wen–wu* dichotomy, be it from Gu's role-playing perspective or Yang's, finally has the effect of highlighting Yang Huizhen's role as a female knight-errant. She is a key protagonist in all the

major action sequences. In all these battle scenes, Gu is only seen at the margins. He observes but does not participate. The fight sequences are notable for the revelation of Yang Huizhen's extraordinary abilities as a warrior but they are also notable for exposing Gu's helplessness.

The action sequences are, to be sure, an indispensable part of *A Touch of Zen*'s appeal. Hu takes special delight in the presentation of these sequences, which are long elaborate set pieces in his *cinema opera* style. The sequences work primarily on a visceral level of action cinema emphasising sensual excitement and suspense, but ultimately, they work on the level of epiphany. The final epiphany of action and violence is the realisation of one's mortality which thus compels the knight-errant towards moral conduct. Yang Huizhen is marked by pre-destiny that makes her seem immortal, but this is an illusion. The concluding scenes show that Yang has yet to achieve her own state of transcendence and that she is not immortal. In other words, Yang is relegated to her final role, which is that of a human being, denying her the historicist role of the female knight-errant with the ability to vanish into thin air and be immortal.

Conclusion

The literary origins of the female knight-errant have made the figure a standard stereotype in the *wuxia* genre. Whereas Hu forged the cinematic configuration of the female knight-errant figure in *Come Drink With Me* into a refreshing archetype of the new school *wuxia* movement, he continued to examine the figure in *A Touch of Zen* and suggests that the female knight-errant is a persisting enigma. Out of this enigma, Hu attempted to impose a 'Zen' reading into the character, seeing in her the potential to encompass spiritual depth and taking the 'heroic transformation' of women into the territory of transcendentalism. In the final scenes, the Zen patriarch Hui Yuan is treacherously stabbed by Xu Xianchun, and this leads to a transfiguration of the patriarch as he enters the valley of death. The heroic female knight-errant becomes rather insignificant – in fact she is made almost redundant – and her dilemmas seem no longer to matter against the urgency of the patriarch's transfiguration that transpires before our very eyes. This 'transcendental' ending appears to transfix the female knight-errant on the ground, as if she is brought down to earth from the lofty heights of her literary mythical presence and she can no longer disappear into the void. In placing the *xianü* within the context of a universal cry for understanding and transcendentalism, she becomes like one of us: a human being.

This final reduction of the mythical female knight-errant figure into human status is meant to provoke us into a philosophical understanding of our selves. The subject of Buddhist transcendence is Hu's way of delivering the ultimate critique of the genre's *raison d'être* which is the audience's wish-fulfilment for heroes to save them from their own vulnerability. In Hu's *wuxia* cinema, heroes

die no matter how preternaturally strong they are, or how disciplined and well trained in the martial arts. The heroes, like the audience, are mortal, and must do their best to achieve transcendence themselves.

Notes

1. See Wan Chi, 'Xiaoshuo, wutai, yinmu shang de "Ernü yingxiong zhuan"' ('Novel, Stage and Screen Versions of *Ernü yingxiong zhuan*'), *Nanguo dianying* ('Southern Screen'), No. 16, June 1959, pp. 70–73.
2. Peggy Chiao Hsiung-ping, 'The Master of Swordplays', *Cinemaya*, No. 39/40, Winter/Spring 1998, 72–76, esp. p. 74.
3. See Kam Louie and Louise Edwards, 'Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing *Wen* and *Wu*', p. 140.
4. King Hu, 'Cong pai guzhuang pian dianying souji ziliao du qi' ('Collecting Materials for Making Period Costume Movies'), in Huang Ren (ed.), *Hu Jinquan de shijie* ('The World of King Hu') (Taipei: Asia-Pacific Press, 1999), pp. 272–278, esp. p. 276.
5. See Louie and Edwards, 'Chinese Masculinity', p. 140.
6. See Y. W. Ma, 'The Knight-Errant in *Hua-pen* Stories', p. 285.
7. Tang Wenbiao, 'Pingyuan jimu: cong longmen kezhan yingpian tan qi' ('On the Plains, Looking as Far as the Eye Can See: A Discussion Proceeding from the Film *Dragon Inn*'), *Ming bao yuekan* ('Ming Pao Monthly'), 3:6, June 1968, 72–81, esp. p. 72.
8. Joseph Lau Shiu-ming, '"Longmen kezhan" zai Mei Yazhou xuenian hui fangying qianhou zhongqie' ('Report on Showing *Dragon Inn* in the US Association of Asian Studies'), *Mingbao yuekan* ('Ming Pao Monthly'), 3:8, August 1968, 18–20, p. 18.
9. See Ye Hongsheng, *Shu shan jianxia pingzhuan* ('The Swordsman of Shu Shan: A Critical Biography') (Taipei: Yuanjing Publishing House, 1982), p. 3.
10. King Hu, 'Shu lei' ('Piling Up Books'), in *Hu Jinquan de shijie* ('The World of King Hu'), pp. 265–271, esp. p. 266. Hu also mentioned that he had once met Huanzhu Louzhu reclining on his smoking couch (the author was a known opium addict) and listening to him reciting stories. This memory had remained with him even after thirty years.
11. See Yamada and Udagawa, *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 27.
12. Ibid., p. 68.
13. King Hu, 'Zhongguo chuantong xiqu yu wo de dianying' ('Chinese Traditional Opera and My Movies'), *Minsheng bao*, Taipei, 30 July 1980.
14. See Stephen Teo, 'Only the Valiant: King Hu and His *Cinema Opera*', in Law Kar (ed.), *Transcending the Times: King Hu and Eileen Chang*, 22nd Hong Kong International Film Festival (Hong Kong: Provisional Urban Council, 1998), pp. 19–24.
15. See Hector Rodriguez, 'Questions of Chinese Aesthetics: Film Form and Narrative Space in the Cinema of King Hu', *Cinema Journal*, 38:1, Autumn 1998, 73–97, esp. p. 84.
16. For a brief analysis of Hu's editing (the tavern sequence) in *Come Drink With Me*, see Peter Rist, 'King Hu, Experimental, Narrative Filmmaker', in Davis and Chen (ed.), *Cinema Taiwan*, pp. 161–171, esp. pp. 162–163.
17. See David Bordwell, 'Richness Through Imperfection: King Hu and the Glimpse', in Fu and Desser (ed.), *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 113–136.
18. James Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, p. 129. Liu gives a synopsis of the novel: see pp. 124–129. For an analysis of the novel, including translations of passages from the text, see John Christopher Hamm, 'Reading the Swordswoman's Tale:

Shisanmei and *Ernü yingxiong zhuan*', *T'oung Pao*, Vol. LXXXIV, 1998, pp. 328–355. See also Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), pp. 272–302.

19. See Wai-Yee Li, 'Heroic Transformations: Women and National Trauma in Early Qing Literature', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 59:2, December 1999, pp. 363–443.
20. See John Christopher Hamm, 'Reading the Swordswoman's Tale', p. 336.
21. See Kwai-cheung Lo, 'Fighting Female Masculinity: Women Warriors and Their Foreignness in Hong Kong Action Cinema of the 1980s', in Laikwan Pang and Day Wong (ed.), *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, pp. 137–154, esp. p. 142.
22. Chun-shu Chang and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *Redefining History: Ghosts, Spirits, and Human Society in P'u Sung-ling's World, 1640–1715* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 177.
23. See Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 272.
24. Ibid., p. 273.
25. This was pointed out in a review by Zhang Che published in 1960. The review is included in *Zhang Che: huiyi lu, yingping ji* ('Zhang Che: Memoirs and Collections of Film Reviews') (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002), pp. 204–205, see p. 204.
26. See Wai-Yee Li, 'Heroic Transformations', fn 5, p. 366.
27. Interview with Sha Yung-fong, San Francisco, 24 March 2001. The contract was personally drafted by Hu himself, and is now placed on file at the Taipei Film Archive.
28. See Song Ziwen, *Taiwan dianying sanshi nian* ('Thirty Years of Taiwan Cinema') (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2006), p. 52.
29. Interview with Sha Yung-fong.
30. See Huang Ren (ed.), *Lianbang dianying shidai* ('Union and Its Film Era'), p. 32.
31. See Yamada and Udagawa, *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 80.
32. The original title of the screenplay was 'Chongjun' ('The Banishment'). Hua Huiying, the cameraman, suggested after reading the script that since most of the action was set in the Dragon Gate Inn, the title should be changed to *Dragon Gate Inn*. See Hua Huiying, 'Xingjian guoji dianying zhipian chang shimo' ('Building the International Studio: Its Beginning and End'), in Huang Ren (ed.), *Lianbang dianying shidai*, pp. 67–70, esp. p. 67. My reference to the title *Dragon Inn* throughout the text is based on the positivist identification of the English credit title actually printed on the film itself and thereafter disseminated widely through press publicity (I might also confess to a nostalgia bias since I saw the film as young boy when it was first released and have always known it as 'Dragon Inn').
33. Tang Wenbiao, 'Pingyuan jimu', p. 73.
34. Vicki Ooi, 'Jacobean Drama and the Martial Arts Films of King Hu: A Study in Power and Corruption', *Australian Journal of Screen Theory*, no. 7 (1980), 103–123, esp. p. 112.
35. Ibid., p. 112.
36. The role made a star out of Bai Ying, who was later recruited by Shaw Brothers to appear in *Gui taijian* ('The Eunuch', 1971), playing naturally the title role. The production was another sign of Hu's influence on the studio, but this time following the success of *Dragon Inn*, which Shaws distributed in its overseas market. The director of 'The Eunuch' was Ye Rongzu who also directed *The Black Tavern* (1972), another King Hu rip-off.
37. See Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 49.

38. For a brief synopsis of the story, see Karl S. Y. Kao, '*Bao* and *Baoying*'. Kao notes that the heroine is motivated by a 'powerful passion' which has to do 'with a different kind of code, a code combining the precept of knight-errantry with a general precept based on social relations' (p. 116). This code is *bao* and *baoying*, meaning revenge but also involving other social interactions: reciprocations of obligations, retaliations and recompensations: see p. 120. On revenge as an application of justice in ancient Chinese law, see Michael Dalby, 'Revenge and the Law in Traditional China', *The American Journal of Legal History*, 25:4, October 1981, pp. 267–307.
39. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 237.
40. See Karl Kao, '*Bao* and *Baoying*', p. 120.
41. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 235.
42. See Karl Kao, '*Bao* and *Baoying*', p. 120.
43. The phrase quoted comes from chapter 36 of *Romance*, in the translation by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1985, a reprint of the 1925 edition by Kelly and Walsh, Shanghai), p. 383.
44. For a translation of Xianü in the English language, see Herbert Giles, 'The Magnanimous Girl', in his translations of selected Liaozhai zhiyi stories. *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (Hong Kong: Kelly and Walsh, 1968, reprint of 1908 second edition). See also the translation by Lorraine S. Y. Lieu, Y. W. Ma and Joseph Lau as 'The Lady Knight Errant', in Y. W. Ma and Joseph Lau (eds), *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations* (Boston, MA: Cheng and Tsui Company, 1986), pp. 77–81.
45. Ciment interview, English transcript.
46. Yamada and Udagawa, *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 96.
47. Louie and Edwards, 'Chinese Masculinity', p. 138.
48. Ibid., p. 138.
49. Ibid., p. 145.
50. Zhang Che, 'Tan wuxia pian' ('A Discussion on *Wuxia* Pictures').
51. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 238.
52. I have taken Kristeva's concept of *jouissance* from readings of her writings, primarily her interpretations of feminist theory in the framework of Judaeo-Christian traditions in the first part of *About Chinese Women*. See also the extracted chapters from *About Chinese Women* in Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, Ed. Toril Moi, trans. Seán Hand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 139 159. On the concept of 'drives', see the chapter 'The Semiotic *Chora* Ordering the Drives,' in Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 25–30.
53. The quotes here are taken from Greenblatt's analysis of Wyatt's poetry, in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 150.
54. See Kristeva, 'About Chinese Women', in The Kristeva Reader, p. 23. Kristeva's analysis proceeds from the foundation of Judaism and patriarchal monotheism, a context which shares some similarities with Chinese traditional society in the idea of patriarchy though not that of monotheism, although the idea of ancestral worship may be said to follow some elements of a monotheistic religion.
55. See Karl Kao, '*Bao* and *Baoying*', p. 116.
56. See Louie and Edwards, 'Chinese Masculinity', p. 145.
57. Kristeva, 'About Chinese Women', in The Kristeva Reader, pp. 87–88.

6. *WUXIA* AFTER *A TOUCH OF ZEN*

This chapter examines the development of the *wuxia* film in the period following *A Touch of Zen*, perhaps the first true masterpiece in the genre though it did not receive the critical recognition it deserved when first released. The film was a box-office failure in Taiwan following its release in two instalments in 1970 and 1971. In Hong Kong, it was cut down to a single two-and-a-half-hour movie, and released in 1971, in the wake of Bruce Lee's box-office sensation *The Big Boss*. It too flopped, thus signalling the rise of the kung fu phenomenon and the end of the new school *wuxia* cycle.

The box-office failure of *A Touch of Zen* had major repercussions for the Taiwan film industry. Sha Yung-fong has admitted that Union's financial problems really stemmed from the massive investment it poured into *A Touch of Zen* and its box-office failure.[1] Although Union continued to make *wuxia* movies, the company soon diversified its product line by churning out melodramas with contemporary settings, recognising that the *wuxia* film was no longer a commercial proposition and that another action genre, namely the kung fu movie, had replaced it. Union produced a few kung fu movies in 1971–1973, such as Jimmy Wang Yu's *Heibai dao* (*The Brave and the Evil*, 1971) and *Nü quanshi* (*A Girl Fighter*, 1972), both starring Hu's discovery from *Dragon Inn*, Shangguan Lingfeng, but never reaped the expected financial bonanza and in 1974, the studio closed down its production component.[2]

Hu's own career following *A Touch of Zen* proceeded back in Hong Kong where he made two noteworthy *wuxia* films, *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973) and *Zhonglie tu* (*The Valiant Ones*, 1975). *The Fate of Lee Khan* is a highly

entertaining variation of the female knight-errant movie in that it presents a variety of female warriors each one utilising different skills (including pick-pocketing) in fighting for a nationalistic cause – the establishment of the Ming state in the dying days of the Mongol Yuan dynasty. Xu Feng, the lead in *A Touch of Zen*, is given a villainous role, thus subverting the perception of the female knight-errant as a primarily beneficent role model or prototype. In fact, the female warriors in *The Fate of Lee Khan* are highly subversive since they scheme, steal, seduce, manipulate and kill. They are therefore, a less idealistic vision of the female knight-errant figure, which in the final analysis makes her more human.

Hu never quite saw the female knight-errant figure in the same mythic-heroic light again after the ending of *A Touch of Zen*. Xu Feng is the sole female warrior figure in *The Valiant Ones*, playing the silent, taciturn partner of a male knight-errant known as the 'Whirlwind Swordsman' (Bai Ying). They join a small company of military men led by General Yu Dayou[3] (Roy Chiao) to combat pirates on the southern coast of China. Xu Feng's role in *The Valiant Ones* is best described as heroically nondescript. She is heroic but in a completely self-effacing fashion, and in a touching kind of way, she is present wholly as support to her partner, the Whirling Swordsman.

Both *The Fate of Lee Khan* and *The Valiant Ones* are essentially military pieces with an emphasis on stratagem, which makes them closer to the style of *Dragon Inn* and *A Touch of Zen*. While the earlier works focused more on swordfighting, the combat styles in both *The Fate of Lee Khan* and *The Valiant Ones* were more varied and tended towards the use of unarmed combat in key scenes. The presence of Sammo Hung in *The Valiant Ones* and the martial arts directing credit that he received was Hu's recognition of the newly emerging kung fu trend. Apart from Hung, Hu also employed Jackie Chan, who appeared in various unrecognisable bit parts throughout the film, and Yuan Biao. All three became huge stars in the 1980s. In employing these younger talents, Hu was forging a continuity of martial arts choreography between the new school *wuxia* and the kung fu cinema which would soon be dominated by baby-boomers such as Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan.

As the martial arts choreographer of *The Valiant Ones*, Sammo Hung was consciously aware of Hu's operatic combat style. Thus the somersaults, the leaps into the air, and the subsequent diving assaults resorted to by the Japanese pirate Hakatatsu (played by Hung himself) in the last desperate stages of his combat with the 'Whirlwind Swordsman' Wu Jiyuan (Bai Ying) are evocative of Yang Huizhen's leaping and diving tactics in the bamboo forest sequence in *A Touch of Zen*, choreographed by Han Yingjie who also appeared in *The Valiant Ones*.

The *Valiant Ones* is close to being a great work, Hu's last full-length *wuxia* picture. As such, it is his swan song to the genre, and should rightly be seen as a final testament of Hu's self-fashioning enterprise. The picture ends in mourn-

ing and a note of emotional burn-out following the climactic battle, characterised by frenzied whirlings, desperate leaps, vaults and dives, which would have made it difficult for King Hu to make another *wuxia* picture that would equal its achievement; and in fact, he never did. *The Valiant Ones* was released a few months before his success in the 1975 Cannes Film Festival with *A Touch of Zen* where it won the Grand Prize for Superior Technique.

The victory at Cannes did not prompt Hu to make more *wuxia* pictures. Instead, he diversified his range although it is important to note that his range was still limited to the historical period drama (*guzhuang pian*), a form that remained basic to Hu's career. Films such as *Kongshan lingyu* (*Raining in the Mountain*) and *Shanzhong chuanqi* (*Legend of the Mountain*), both released in 1979, did not belong to the *wuxia* genre but could certainly be seen as sub-variations of *wuxia*. They both contain action scenes entailing elaborate martial arts choreography. *Raining* is in fact Hu's last major work. The film features a female knight-errant figure (again played by Xu Feng), but from the other side of the moral divide – the character being a thief and probably a killer without conscience. Thus, though the film does not deal with *wuxia* themes in the classical sense of the knight-errant quest to eliminate evil on behalf of an oppressed community or to exact revenge on an unjust official for causing the death of one's father, it does touch on the theme of moral enlightenment in the manner of *A Touch of Zen* but without achieving the same depth of that earlier work.

The plot deals with a power-struggle in a Buddhist monastery as the old abbot is about to retire and nominate his successor. The action stems from the sub-plot involving rich lay patrons of the monastery who have gathered to advise over the selection of the new abbot but in fact harbour an ulterior motive to steal a valuable sutra. A female thief, White Fox (Xu Feng), is one of the chief protagonists. The fact that Xu Feng plays all the female protagonists in Hu's films from *A Touch of Zen* onward underlines a striking continuity of theme and variation in the figure of the female knight-errant and underscores Hu's affinity with the *yin* side of the *yin–yang* equation. The final sequences of action are some of the most stunning that Hu ever achieved – a spectacle of women leaping down and somersaulting over cliffs and rocks to capture White Fox and her partner as they try to make their getaway after stealing the sutra.

The reputation of King Hu (who died in 1997) rests mainly on his *wuxia* pictures and particularly on *A Touch of Zen* as his sole masterpiece. His mascot from that film, the female knight-errant, has endured to the present following her revival through films from *Crouching Tiger* to *Hero* to *House of Flying Daggers*, while Zhang Che's *yang gang* wave of masculinity appears to have receded. David Desser opines that Hu has left behind an 'overstated legacy' though he is at pains to point out that in saying so, he seeks to 'take nothing away from King Hu's artistry and talent'.[4]

Desser gives a few factors for the 'historical overrating' of Hu. One is the trend

in criticism favouring gender representation whereby Hu's female knight-errant films are therefore prized as proto-feminist if not completely feminist allegories. Another is Hu's perceived Chinese essentialism in his efforts to construct a 'Chinese' aesthetic.[5] Both factors are said to be 'overstated'. However, the truth is that Hu's legacy has been forgotten much of the time, not least by Desser himself when he stated that 'it was precisely Hu's continuation of the legacy of Mandarin movies prizing female stars that prevented his continuing impact in the mid-1960s'.[6] In fact, from the mid-1960s onwards, Hu's success with *Come Drink With Me* and *Dragon Inn* fostered a wave of female knight-errant movies, from the Shaw Brothers potboilers starring Zheng Peipei, such as *Hong lajiao* (*That Fiery Girl*, 1968), *Yu luosha* (*The Jade Raksha*, 1968), *Du longtan* (*Dragon Swamp*, 1969), *Huangjiang nüxia* (*Lady of Steel*, 1970), *Wuhu tulong* (*Brothers Five*, 1970), and *Yingzi shenbian* (*The Shadow Whip*, 1971), to above-average forays into the sub-genre, such as Luo Wei's *Bingtian xianü* (*Vengeance of a Snow Girl*, 1971), female director Gao Baoshu's *Feng Feifei* (*Lady with a Sword*, 1971), Bao Xueli's *Taiyin zhi* (*Finger of Doom*, 1972), Cheng Gang's *Shisi nü yinghao* (*The Fourteen Amazons*, 1972) and Chu Yuan's *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (1972). One could go on, citing the female knights-errant who have appeared in the films of Tsui Hark and Wong Kar-wai to Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the films of Zhang Yimou.

Without doubt Hu's greatest legacy in the martial arts cinema is that of the popularisation of the female knight-errant figure as a revitalising heroine in both the *wuxia* and kung fu forms. It was he who essentially cultivated the most enduring stars, Zheng Peipei, Xu Feng, Shangguan Lingfeng, and such figures as Angela Mao and Helen Ma, both of whom starred in *The Fate of Lee Khan*. The female knight-errant wave in the Hong Kong and Taiwan cinemas remains still a largely misunderstood phenomenon which went on concurrently with and was eclipsed by the masculine kung fu vogue. However, it was not without success and the careers of Angela Mao, star of such minor classics as Huang Feng's *Heqi dao* (*Hap Ki Do*, 1972), *Tiezhang xuanfeng tui* (*Lady Whirlwind*, 1972), and *Taiquan zhen jiuzhou* (*When Taekwondo Strikes*, 1973), and Helen Ma, star of Wu Ma's *Longya jian* (*The Deaf and Mute Heroine*, 1971), were able to take off because the female knight-errant wave gained its commercial momentum from the precedent set by Hu's films. The films starring Angela Mao and Helen Ma, together with such classics as the Shaw Brothers productions *The Fourteen Amazons* and *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan*, marked an as yet unrecognised high point of the female knight-errant wave in the early 1970s, which is definitely a legacy of Hu's *wuxia* cinema.

Hu's aesthetic and narrative achievements in the genre could not but rub off on some of the seasoned practitioners of the genre in the Hong Kong and Taiwan cinemas, who were otherwise more commercially oriented. Of them, Jimmy Wang Yu is the most worthy of note. Having won fame as *The One-*

Armed Swordsman and becoming a director with *The Chinese Boxer* (1970), one of the first kung fu movies produced at Shaws before the advent of Bruce Lee, he was eager to do serious work in the genre. Shaws had earlier featured him in Cheng Gang's above-average *Shen dao* (*The Sword of Swords*, 1968), a film which denoted the *xia*'s obsession with swords and the lengths that men would go to in order to possess the finest sword.

This theme is repeated in one of the most impressive *wuxia* films of the early 1970s after *A Touch of Zen*, *Jian* (*The Sword*, 1972), which Wang set up independently as a joint Taiwan – Hong Kong production and co-directed with Pan Lei (Wang handling the action sequences). Set against the background of the Warring States period, the story relates how the sovereign of one of the states tries to secure the services of a renowned swordsman Xiahou Wei (Jimmy Wang Yu) by baiting him with the ownership of the finest sword in the land. Xiahou falls for the bait, is granted the sword but then a sage enters and tells him that there is another finer sword in the hands of a recluse. He sets out to find the recluse, an old retired swordsman with a young daughter and plots to possess the sword through fair and foul means.

Xiahou Wei is so obsessed with the sword that he is willing to forgo all principles, betraying his country and family to possess it. His obsession stems from the dictum that a superior sword must be in the possession of the best and bravest swordsmen, now a familiar theme because it was used in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (cf. Zhang Ziyi's stealing of the Green Destiny sword because she believes a fine sword should belong to a fine swordsperson, namely herself). When Xiahou finally obtains the sword after provoking the swordsman into a duel, he discovers that it cannot be removed from its scabbard. The sage appears and tells him that the sword has rusted onto the scabbard. 'Why did you tell me that it is the finest sword?', asks Xiahou. The sage replies, 'It is indeed the finest sword because no one has ever used it for twenty years'.

Wang Yu's work in the genre tended towards more formulaic elements of action, as in *Dubei quanwang* (*The One-Armed Boxer*, 1971), *Zhanshen tan* (*Beach of the War Gods*, 1972), and the modern kung fu co-production (with Australia), *The Man from Hong Kong* (1975). *The Sword* by contrast is thoroughly focused on its theme and Wang Yu so outclasses himself in his performance that the whole film can be said to be self-driven. Thus, *The Sword* is an ambitious critique of the knight-errant's worship of swords, a fundamental weapon-prop in the whole mythology of *wuxia*. Whether or not the sword as a symbol of righteousness and justice can manifest the *xia* character is clearly a theme expounded in some of the more impressive *wuxia* films produced in the post-*A Touch of Zen* period. Wang Yu's and Pan Lei's *The Sword* and Patrick Tam's later New Wave work, *Ming jian* (*The Sword*, 1980) are the cinematic progenitors of *Crouching Tiger* (2000) and its heroine's passion for the 'Green Destiny'.

The question about Hu's impact largely concerns the legacy of *A Touch of Zen*. Did the critical value of *A Touch of Zen* exert any impact on the *wuxia* genre as a whole, particularly after it won a prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1975? Following the Cannes victory of *A Touch of Zen*, the *wuxia* genre developed intermittently in irregular cycles of production. There was a surge in 1976 in the form of a series of films based on the novels of new school novelist Gu Long, directed by Chu Yuan for the Shaw Brothers Studio. These films reintroduced swordfighting as a fresh and exciting ingredient into the martial arts cinema then dominated by fist-fighting and leg-kicking kung fu. Some fifteen or sixteen films were produced from 1976 to 1980 (and this does not include those Gu Long films produced outside of the Shaw Brothers stable, often as co-productions between Taiwan and Hong Kong talent).

The Chu Yuan–Gu Long cycle was influential in its own right and the films were the direct precursors of the Hong Kong New Wave's brief *wuxia* cycle including Tsui Hark's *Die bian* (*The Butterfly Murders*, 1979), Patrick Tam's *The Sword* (1980), and Johnnie To's *Bishui hanshan duoming jin* (*The Enigmatic Case*, 1980). The New Wave *wuxia* films showed a high level of artistry that would have been quite inconceivable without Hu's groundwork. The mood and atmosphere of *The Butterfly Murders* and Tam's *The Sword* recall nothing more than the whole of Episode 1 of *A Touch of Zen* and its labyrinthine re-castings of narrative modes, with stylish action choreography as a prerequisite of the genre.

The two major *wuxia* films of the 1980s, Tsui Hark's *Shushan jianxia* (*Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain*, 1983) and Ann Hui's *Shujian enchou lu* (*Romance of Book and Sword*, 1987), an adaptation of the Jin Yong novel, were blockbuster productions which were not huge successes at the box office, and they did not generate a new cycle of production. The box-office success of *Xiaoao jianghu* (*Swordsman*) in 1990 did spark a fresh cycle that lasted until 1995. This cycle was crowned off by two key works: Wong Kar-wai's *Dongxie Xidu* (*Ashes of Time*, 1994) and Tsui Hark's *Dao* (*The Blade*, 1995). The *wuxia* film tailed off for several more years before another cycle was initiated by the huge success of Andrew Lau's *Fengyun* (*The Stormriders*, 1998). This cycle has since peaked with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* but the orbit of production began to move away from Hong Kong and into the Chinese mainland, which will be the subject of the next chapter.

I will go on below to discuss the films of Chu Yuan, the most outstanding director working in the genre prior to and after Hu's achievement with *A Touch of Zen*. This will be followed by sections entitled 'The Kung Fu New Wave', analysing the impact of the kung fu cinema, and 'The New Wave and Wuxia', analysing the impact of the rise of the New Wave and the postmodern import of Tsui Hark's *wuxia* films and Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time*, perhaps the most iconoclastic of all *wuxia* films. How do directors like Tsui and Wong show

historical continuity in the genre? In their films, there is self-awareness not so much of the past as of the present, but one element of *wuxia* historicism is the light that it casts on history. Directors such as Tsui Hark and Wong Kar-wai, who are labelled postmodernists, may also be recognised as new historicists for their self-reflexive method of looking at the past and how they reshape the past to look at the history of the present.

The *Wuxia* Films of Chu Yuan

Chu Yuan, a Cantonese director (his name in Cantonese is Chor Yuen) with a long record of Cantonese melodramas which he directed throughout the 1960s, joined the Shaw Brothers Studio in 1971 after a short stint at the Cathay Studio where he directed *Cold Blade*, one of the studio's most outstanding *wuxia* films (discussed in Chapter 6). Chu's first project at Shaws was a standard *wuxia* film *Huobing* (*Duel for Gold*, 1971), a work that tries to demolish *wuxia* myths about loyalty, fidelity and the sense of uprightness among the male and female knight-errant figures of the *jianghu*, but it was *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan*, released in 1972, that first gained Chu acclaim and attention.

In the wake of *A Touch of Zen*'s treatment of the female knight-errant figure as a 'complete' transformation from martial arts heroine seeking revenge to chaste woman seeking self-redemption, *Intimate Confessions* offers a sensationalistic reverse of that transformation. The protagonist, named Ainu (meaning literally 'slave of love', played by Lily Ho, a sexy starlet in the Shaw stable), is a virgin abducted and sold to a brothel where she resists being inducted into prostitution at first but eventually submits. She becomes the lover of the brothel-madam, Chun Yi (or 'Auntie' Chun, played by Bei Di), a *femme fatale* 'who does not like men' and a formidable warrior in her own right, her chief weapons being both her hands which can pierce through flesh (there is of course great Freudian symbolism in this conceit, all the more marked when at the end, both her hands are cut off). Auntie Chun teaches Ainu the martial arts and she becomes an assassin, taking revenge on the men who have abducted her and the rich clients, men of influence, who have paid to spent a night with her.

Thus, Ainu is transformed from a chaste virgin into a female knight-errant wreaking personal vengeance on the unworthy men who have despoiled her, and finally, on Chun Yi herself. Ainu cuts off Chun Yi's left hand in the final duel (her right hand was cut off earlier by a male partner in the brothel who loves her and who had wanted to kill Ainu). The film is structured like a detective thriller, and many of Chu's subsequent *wuxia* films are detective thrillers, with a local detective (Yue Hua) trying to identify Ainu as the killer. The detective eventually becomes more sympathetic to Ainu as he learns about her plight.

The film recalls the *gongan* sub-genre in the *xiayi* literature of the late nineteenth century but with an emphasis on the female knight-errant figure and her quest for justice; Ainu takes the law into her own hands, which is something that a female knight-errant is essentially forced to do where the state organs of justice cannot deliver. *Intimate Confessions* is therefore classic *wuxia* in its focus on the theme of revenge and justice and the unconventional figure of the female knight-errant as the lady avenger and dispenser of justice. Ainu in *Intimate Confessions* is therefore not far different from Yang Huizhen in *A Touch of Zen*. The difference is that Ainu is corrupted by sex and is wholly obsessed with revenge apparently showing no intimation of moral transcendence over violence and sexual desire.

The other woman in the film, Chun Yi, represents the kind of woman that Ainu has become, and in this conception of the two women as mirrors of each other ('We are one and the same' says Ainu in the final battle scenes between them and the men of the brothel), the film marks a significant advance in departing from the paradigm of Thirteenth Sister and the transformation of the female knight-errant figure. To Chen Mo, this depiction of Ainu and Chun Yi united in their final struggle against men is a clear statement of 'gender warfare' and feminist struggle, quite a revolutionary message for its time.[7] However, for Ainu, revenge is paramount, whereas for Chun Yi, love (*qing*) is of the essence in the relationship. This split in the mirror spells disaster for both. There is no self-redemption, only death, which is a more pessimistic and cynical outcome of the knight-errant mission of justice and elimination of evil that sets the tone for Chu Yuan's later *wuxia* films adapted from the novels of Gu Long.

Intimate Confessions works equally well as an erotic piece, the first *wuxia* film of this type, consciously designed to feature sex and lesbianism as ingredients to freshen up the genre in competing with the kung fu film. It was a work before its time, heralding the postmodern sexual sensibility that would be felt much later, in the 1990s, in something like *Xiaoao jianghu II: Dongfang Bubai* (*Swordsman II*, 1992) or the kind of 'Category III film' such as *Rou putuan zhi touqing baojian* (*Sex and Zen*, 1992) that has some historical-period affinity with the *wuxia* genre ('Category III' restricts films with explicit sex and violence to adults only in the Hong Kong ratings system and has become something of a genre in its own right).

The employment of sex as an element in *wuxia* was something that Chu Yuan would include in his Gu Long adaptations *Liuxing hudie jian* (*The Killer Clans*) and *Tianya mingyue dao* (*The Magic Blade*), both released in 1976. These films are not centred on the female knight-errant figure though female warriors do appear prominently in Chu's *wuxia* films, both adapted from Gu Long's novels and the novels of other authors. Chu Yuan's approach differed from that of King Hu's and even Zhang Che's in that he was not a prude in the depiction of

sex and he was neither particularly biased towards the female knight-errant or the masculine kind.

Chu was something of a sexual liberationist in that he deliberately included homosexuality and transgender subjects already present in Gu Long's original novels. In *The Magic Blade*, one of the hero's opponents is an androgynous killer, and in *Chu Liuxiang* (*Clans of Intrigue*, 1977), the villain is a transgendered monk (played by Yue Hua), originally a female who turns into a male at the age of fifteen and runs away from her lesbian lover (Bei Di, in a cameo appearance, effectively reprising her role in *Intimate Confessions*). Thus Chu telegraphed the transgender villains in the better known Tsui Hark-produced works *Qiannü youhun* (*A Chinese Ghost Story*, 1987) and *Swordsman II*.

On the other hand, Chu was enough of a Chinese traditionalist to reintegrate into *wuxia* those themes connected with the family and the patriarchy from his Cantonese period during which he excelled in the family melodrama. His *wuxia* films are extensions of the melodrama in that they are concerned with inter-clan intrigue and rivalry, applications of loyalty and filiality, and the place of the individual hero within the system. These concerns are principally developed in *The Killer Clans*, *Clans of Intrigue*, *Baiyu laohu* (*The Jade Tiger*, 1977), and *Wudu tianluo* (*The Web of Death*, 1976). The last was not from a Gu Long novel but actually a reworking of early episodes from Jin Yong's novel *Yitian tulong ji* (*The Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre*; he later made an official version of this novel, released in two instalments in 1978).

The Jade Tiger is his most representative *wuxia* family melodrama, and arguably the director's best *wuxia* film, a work approaching the tragic dimensions of Greek tragedy. It tells of a feud between two rival families in the world of the martial arts, commonly referred to under the trope of *wulin* (the martial arts forest). The Tang family seeks to dominate the *wulin* by its use of deadly poisons, and the Zhao family hatches a plan for one of its trusted members to infiltrate the Tang headquarters so as to destroy its secret formulas of making poisons and to wipe out the entire Tang clan. The head of the Zhao clan sacrifices his own life so that his advisor Shangguan Ren (Gu Feng) can defect to the Tang clan carrying his head as gift. He also carries a jade tiger in which is enclosed a secret document. Zhao Wuji (Di Long), the son of the late clan leader, sets off to the Tang mansion to take revenge on Shangguan and retrieve the jade tiger.

During his journey, he encounters various deadly eccentrics of the *jianghu* and at one point, is wounded and is saved by a brother and sister who refuse to give their names. They later turn out to be members of the Tang family who have deliberately withdrawn into the wilderness in order to get away from the bloody intrigues. Wuji (who disguises himself with a new identity, Li Zhongtang) marries the sister, Tang Yu (Shi Si), so as to gain the trust of the malevolent elder brother who rules the Tang family. However, they do fall in

love, and Wuji has, by marrying Tang Yu, betrayed his own fiancée who chooses to invade the Tang family mansion on the wedding day to denounce Wuji as a traitor. Tragedy ensues as both the fiancée and Tang Yu separately kill themselves as the two clans become immersed in the struggle to wipe each other out. Thus the film reverses the cliché of the good versus the evil in presenting its central hero as a man caught between two families, or two sides of the same *wulin* coin, each side resorting to meaningless violence.

The Killer Clans, the first film in the Chu Yuan-Gu Long cycle, was basically a dry run for the plot structure and themes of *The Jade Tiger*. It was billed in fact as a *Godfather*-like saga in which a trusted *consigliere* plots to get rid of a clan leader known as 'Uncle' and take control of the *wulin* but is outwitted by the wily 'Uncle'.[8] *The Magic Blade*, the second film in the series, introduced the model of an individual hero (almost invariably played by Di Long) who sets out to find the chief villain causing havoc in the *wulin* by his intention to hegemonise it, usually through possession of a secret powerful weapon. This is essentially the plot structure of most of the Gu Long adaptations, including *The Jade Tiger*, *Clans of Intrigue*, *Duoqing jianke wuqing jian* (*The Sentimental Swordsman*, 1977), *Xiao Shiyilang* (*Swordsman and Enchantress*, 1978) – the best films in the series. *The Magic Blade* also sets the pattern of a swordfighting extravaganza through a series of exciting and innovative action set-pieces.

The Magic Blade impressed audiences with its action sequences constructed around motifs of Chinese art and aesthetics such as poetry, painting, chess, sword and the *qin* (the Chinese lute). There is, for instance, a sequence in which the hero Fu Hongxue (Di Long) and his companions are placed on a giant chessboard out in the open air in which they must fight opponents represented as other chess pieces. In another sequence, Fu battles an array of soldiers laid out according to the formation of the Chinese word *jian*, meaning sword. The film is gimmicky in this manner but highly atmospheric, with Gothic touches of *shenguai* mystery that seemed more New Age than retrogressive Old School, and self-consciously poetic and literary at times.

Indeed, one characteristic of Chu Yuan's *wuxia* films is the inclusion of many lines of poetry that bolster the new school *wuxia* movement's aspirations (some might say pretensions) to literature. The melodrama genre traditionally emphasises both romanticism and literariness as attributes of the hero or heroine, and by virtue of such attributes, Chu is less concerned with masculinity in the mould of Zhang Che's *yang gang* male leads though his typical heroic male is usually played by Di Long, one of Zhang's *yang gang* alumni. To be more precise, Chu's male heroes are predisposed to the quality of *qing* meaning emotion, emphasising affection, tenderness, romanticism and a fateful, tragic essence of love. Zhao Wuji in *The Jade Tiger* is the classic *wuxia* tragic hero whose entanglement with *qing* saps his judgement and character. Li Xunhuan in *The Sentimental Swordsman* is a near-tragic figure whose sentimentality clouds his

judgement of friends. Having given up his own fiancée to a friend who saved his life, the friend turns into his nemesis full of contempt for his attitude and hatches an elaborate plot to frame him up for a series of murders of illustrious knights in the *wulin* (the friend says to Li, 'I took revenge on you not by using the sword, but by using *qing*').

In the sequel, *Mojian xiaqing* (*The Return of the Sentimental Swordsman*, 1981), there is a classic scene of Li Xunhuan, who has all along been shown as a melancholic consumptive hero given to alcoholism, coughing up blood, a romantic expression of the tragic lover in Cantonese melodramas. This ailment however does not affect the hero's swordfighting skills – it serves only to add romance to his character. Xiao Shiyilang in *Swordsman and Enchantress* falls in love with Chen Bijun (Jing Li, another regular in the series), the wife of a rival and jealous swordsman. Making use of *qing*, Bijun manipulates both her husband and Shiyilang into confronting each other, part of another elaborate plot to rule the *wulin* conceived by a swordmaker, whose daughter is in fact Chen Bijun. The swordmaker cynically uses his own daughter as a means to attain his end and when Bijun herself falls prey to *qing* at the very last moment, she is killed by her own father. Chu Liuxiang in *Clans of Intrigue* is a less tragic romantic but no less susceptible to female wiles and gender politics.

With models like Fu Hongxue, Zhao Wuji, Li Xunhuan, Xiao Shiyilang and Chu Liuxiang (all played by Di Long), Chu Yuan has managed to realise the type of romantic hero (the Wen Suchen type discussed in Chapter 6) mixing tenderness and masculinity that marked the deliberation over how to delineate the *wuxia* hero in the beginning of the new school movement. Zhang Che's *yang gang* hero emphasised 'hard' masculinity on the whole though they were not without romantic sensibility, but Chu Yuan's hero can be said to be romantic on the whole though still possessing the requisite masculine sensibility to be good fighters.

Of course, in Chu's films females were very much present, either as protagonists or antagonists. As the latter, they usually combined softness with evil intent – the model being Chun Yi from *Intimate Confessions* who is more or less remanifested as the Princess Yin Ji in *Clans of Intrigue* and as other characters played by different actresses in further films. In *Daxia Shen Shengyi* (*The Roving Swordsman*, 1983), from a Huang Ying novel, the romantic swordsman Shen Shengyi (Di Long) is confronted with a female nemesis, Murong Gufang (Cheng Kewei) who displays the cunning of the clan leader 'Uncle' from *The Killer Clans* and the ruthlessness of Chun Yi.

In as far as there was always a good mix of masculine and feminine facets in the characters, there was an uncanny blend of *yin* and *yang* factors branding the aesthetics of Chu's visual design. In many films, he consciously invoked Gothic elements, setting up characters as if they were ghosts or fox-spirits (denizens of the *yin* world), as in *Yuanyue wandao* (*Full Moon Scimitar*, 1979),

and exposing them into the *yang* universe which is no better because it is full of *yin* intrigue. This kind of Gothic noir mood is prevalent in nearly all his *wuxia* films.

As a part of his *yin* aesthetics, Chu was fond of using transparent silk gauzes or screens with calligraphy or painting to mask fight scenes, as it were. As a result of the swordplay, these screens would be torn apart. He used the luxurious sets of the Shaw Brothers Studio with panache, showing off traditional Chinese courtyards, mansions, corridors, living rooms, antechambers, and bedrooms, often cluttered with bric-a-brac, paintings, calligraphy and antiques, and turning them into arenas for combat – an appropriate metaphor for his preferred theme of clan intrigue and politics. There was a recurrence of the use of poisons, a stereotypically *yin*-feminine fashion of killing one's enemies, but also a recurrence of weird secret weapons edging the movies toward the border of science-fiction (see *The Web of Death* with its malevolent spiders encased in a magical lantern, spinning off deadly webs at the denizens of the *wulin*). Lastly, swordfighting itself is thought to be more feminine in contrast with kung fu which is more masculine. Both forms of combat are employed in Chu's *wuxia* films, although swordplay predominates.

Chu's romanticism and his foothold in melodrama have converged remarkably well with the elements of *wuxia* as deployed in the novels of Gu Long. However, the romanticism of the films is edged with cynicism and a critique about *wuxia* precepts. His heroes, male and female, are often withdrawn and world-weary and they are contrasted with scheming protagonists and betrayers of *xia* principles. Money, sex, fame and self-interest are as much at play in the *wuxia* universe of Chu Yuan as are seemingly heroic qualities of justice, loyalty and righteousness. Lofty emotion (*qing*) is both a strength and weakness and it can be used to disadvantage and deceive an opponent. The Gu Long films demonstrate this theme with more complex plots and use of red herrings and McGuffins (a plot device: the jade tiger in the film of the same name is a classic McGuffin). The action choreography, principally the work of Tang Jia, is more sophisticated in design and often exciting to watch. However, the choreography for all its elegance in execution and ingeniousness tended to be repetitive and distracting though of course they are to be appreciated in their own right as 'attractions' after the notion of the 'cinema of attractions'. Chu Yuan's *mise en scène* towards the end of the series also tended to slipshoddiness, an inevitable outcome of making so many films within a short period of time.

Chu Yuan's *wuxia* films represented a resurgence of the genre which remained spearheaded by the Shaw Brothers Studio. In the 1980s, following the rise of the New Wave in 1979, Chu's films were already running out of steam and Chu himself was a well-worn veteran by then. His films became less distinguished as he prodded along and his directing career soon faded out and he

concentrated on acting. The studio tried to regenerate its ranks of directors with a younger cohort of filmmakers and martial arts directors, putting them to work in the genre. Gui Zhihong's *Wanren zhan* (*Killer Constable*, 1980) is one of the best Shaw Brothers *wuxia* films of the eighties, a remake of Zhang Che's *Tieshou wuqing* (*The Invincible Fist*, 1969), and dealing with the kind of obsessed hero last seen in Wang Yu's *The Sword*. The 'killer constable' of the title (played by Chen Guantai) is given ten days to arrest or kill the robbers of 2 million taels of gold from the imperial treasury and he goes about his mission with an indefatigable ruthlessness, paying a human cost, only to be betrayed by his superior. *Killer Constable* displayed a greater fluency in the execution of martial arts action, a sign of maturity in the genre but also an eagerness to transcend previous achievements as technology and expertise improve.

From the moment it launched the new school *wuxia* movement in 1965, the studio never failed to try in reinvigorating the genre. It did this by injecting new elements, such as homosexuality and eroticism as in *Intimate Confessions*; by adapting new school authors, as in the Chu Yuan-Gu Long cycle, giving a distinctive take on the genre by its unconventional (at the time) blend of sex and violence; and by giving new directors a chance, as in the above case with Gui Zhihong, and best of all, Lau Kar-leong who was promoted to director in 1975 after many years as a second-unit martial arts director choreographing most of Zhang Che's films.

The Kung Fu New Wave

Lau Kar-leong personified the meeting point between martial arts history and martial arts cinema. He is a practitioner of the Hung fist, which originated from Shaolin and was passed on by Wong Fei-hung to Lau's father, Lau Tsam, who had worked as an actor and martial arts choreographer of the Wong Fei-hung films in the 1950s. He himself started out in the cinema as a second-generation 'Dragon-Tiger' master, appearing with his father in the Wong Fei-hung films, and in his second film, *Challenge of the Masters* (1976), he actively evoked the Wong Fei-hung name as if to present his credentials as an heir to his tradition.

As a director, Lau's films contain innumerable references to Shaolin and Wudang traditions, but particularly the former as the fount of kung fu and its generic methods. *Hong Xiguan* (*Executioners from Shaolin*, 1977) and particularly *Shaolin sanshiliu fang* (*36th Chamber of Shaolin*, 1978) are the classic expositions of the Shaolin fighting style and its institutional myths. The successes of these two films spawned his own series of 'Shaolin films' in which Lau regurgitated myths and revelled in the magnificence of its martial arts, purely as balletic-style action: *Tanglang* (*The Shaolin Mantis*, 1978), *Zhonghua zhangfu* (*Shaolin Challenges Ninja*, 1978), *Feng hou* (*Mad Monkey Kung Fu*, 1979), *Shaolin dapeng dashi* (*Return to the 36th Chamber*, 1980), *The Eight*

Diagram Pole Fighter (1984), *Bili shijie* (*Disciple of 36th Chamber*, 1985), *Nanbei Shaolin* (*Martial Arts of Shaolin*, 1986).

In all these films, Lau proved himself as a master choreographer and abstract martial artist, exhibiting geometric forms, body movements and the graceful energy of his exhilarating and elegant choreographic style. The classical intensity of his choreography, seen in all his films but reaching a peak in a work such as *Lantou He* (*Dirty Ho*, 1979), stressed the beauty and precision of movements, and the athletic grace of performers. Above all they imparted a sense of authenticity underlining his linkage with the classical martial arts traditions.

Lau's superb skills as a martial arts choreographer combined with his considerable talent as a storyteller. Apart from *Dirty Ho*, I am particularly disposed to *Zhang bei* (*My Young Auntie*, 1980) and *The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter* as the most impressive integrated demonstrations of narratives and choreographic kung fu dance. All these films put Lau and the whole genre of kung fu into the *avant garde* of Hong Kong action cinema from the late 1970s onwards, at about the same time as the rise of the Hong Kong New Wave itself. Lau's presence as a seminal figure in the Hong Kong kung fu cinema is complemented by that of three other major personalities of the kung fu wave: Sammo Hung, Yuen Wo-ping and Jackie Chan.

Like Lau Kar-leong, Sammo Hung trained in the martial arts from childhood, though he did so under a Beijing Opera master, who also taught Jackie Chan. This background led him to combine opera techniques and kung fu acrobatics to hone a dramatic, indigenous style which he often employed in comedy kung fu pictures, as in *Xiansheng yu Zhaoqian Hua* (*Warriors Two*, 1978), *Zajia xiaozi* (*Knockabout*, 1979), *Gui da gui* (*Encounter of the Spooky Kind*, 1980) and *Ren xia ren* (*The Dead and the Deadly*, 1982). Hung showed even more gusto in his choreography when working under his own direction. In cases where he acted in films directed by others, he was usually responsible for the action choreography. Considering his bulk, he displayed incredible grace and athleticism as a kung fu performer. Like Lau again, Hung was also conscious of the need to please the experts in kung fu. His *Baijia zai* (*The Prodigal Son*, 1981) is regarded as one of the finest martial arts movies of 'genuine kung fu', featuring man-to-man close-quarter combat Wing Chun-school kung fu.[9]

Hung's significance is embedded in his status as a kung fu man for all seasons. He has been a key player in the various stages of development of the martial arts cinema, already active in the late period of new school *wuxia* through his involvement as actor and martial arts choreographer on King Hu's *A Touch of Zen*, *The Fate of Lee Khan* and *The Valiant Ones*. Following the rise of the kung fu movie, Hung consolidated his status through collaborations with Jackie Chan and Yuen Wo-ping, not to mention his own directorial contributions. His debut was the earthy *Sande heshang yu zhuangmi liu* (*The Iron-Fisted Monk*, 1977). Hung's films extend the ideal of bridging old and new currents

of martial arts. He has been a part of the contemporary movements of New Wave *wuxia* (his involvement with Tsui Hark) and postmodern *wuxia* (his involvement as martial arts director of Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time*). His participation in the evolution of kung fu into a globalised genre is illustrated by his starring role in Hollywood's TV series *Martial Law*. He was also one of the pioneers of genre-blending, deftly combining kung fu with comedy and horror in *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* and *The Dead and the Deadly* (Hung was also behind the *Mr. Vampire* series, which he produced).

Yuen Wo-ping's pedigree is no less impressive than Lau's, Hung's or Jackie Chan's. His father was Yuen Siu-tin (Yuan Xiaotian), a first-generation Dragon-Tiger master who appeared in many Wong Fei-hung movies of the 1950s. Yuen joined his father as a bit actor in these movies and eventually climbed up the ranks to become a martial arts director. He made his directing debut in 1978, directing Jackie Chan in *Shexing diaoshou* (*Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*), and featuring his own father, Yuen Siu-tin, in an important part as a master imparting northern kung fu styles and fist-fighting forms to his disciple (played by Chan). He directed Sammo Hung in *The Magnificent Butcher* (1979) but came into his own in the early 1980s with *Yongzhe wuju* (*Dreadnaught*, 1981), *Huo Yuanjia* (*Legend of a Fighter*, 1982) and *Qimen dunjia* (*The Miracle Fighters*, 1982). These early films displayed the characteristic quality of Yuen's expertise with the northern style, including a fascination with Beijing Opera, and its fusion with other fighting styles, drawn from different nations.

I would cite *Legend of a Fighter* as the one kung fu movie of the 1980s (pre-Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China*) that is particularly pronounced on the discourse of the martial arts in the twentieth century revolving around nationalism (the idea of practising martial arts as a matter of national pride), and the fusion of northern and southern martial arts based on the principle that unity is strength. Such a discourse is naturally present in the films of Lau, Hung and Chan, but I am much more taken here by *Legend of a Fighter*'s historical specificity to the question of Chinese nationalism when Hong Kong was facing the issue of 1997 (its future being negotiated at the time by Britain and China) and its ironic response to the concept of unity.

The film is a biography of the young Huo Yuanjia, a real historical figure associated with the nationalism inherent in the practice of martial arts in China at the turn of the twentieth century. Huo Yuanjia is the very same character played by Jet Li in Ronny Yu's *Fearless* (2006; its Chinese title being also *Huo Yuanjia*), and it is relevant here to make some comparisons between the two films. Both films are patently nationalistic but it strikes me that each in their own way depict nationalism as a constraining rather than a liberating force. *Fearless* is of course a post-97 work and presents its Chinese nationalism theme (as represented by Jet Li) against a background of globalised martial arts – the film opens with Huo Yuanjia fighting in the arena against Western opponents,

and finally his Japanese challenger. The foreigners are portrayed as arrogant and in contrast, Huo Yuanjia is almost serene – it is this serenity that restrains him because what unfolds in the narrative (as a flashback) is Huo's awakening to the arrogance of martial arts nationalism causing tragedy in his life. Paradoxically, Huo must now prove himself and to the world that China and its tradition of martial arts are not weak and to be bullied. The lesson of *Fearless* is that the martial arts must be constrained in both the understanding and the practice of it. Its association with nationalism can destroy the spirit of the individual as its force and power are well capable of whipping up the crowd into a nationalistic frenzy. The film is therefore on the surface, highly nationalistic but then goes on to undercut this blatant show of nationalism through the life of Huo Yuanjia himself who then becomes a paragon of abstract nationalism.

In *Legend of a Fighter*, Huo's own father, a martial arts teacher, forbids him to learn the martial arts by watching others practise because he is perceived to be weak. The tenets of his father are that the martial arts may not be taught to foreigners, to the morally corrupt, and to the physically weak. As a way of getting around his father, Huo acquires lessons in the martial arts from another master who teaches him the philosophy of uniting all the styles as the only path to possess true power. This master is revealed in the last minute to be Japanese, a stroke of irony illustrating the inconsistencies in the nationalistic impulses of kung fu. In this case, the father refuses to teach his son because he believes him to be weak but a Japanese teaches him to be strong and thus to fulfil the nationalistic desire of making the country strong.

The theme of nationalism is therefore ironic in *Legend* and *Fearless*, and while nationalism envelopes the kung fu cinema as a structural theme, somehow the kung fu movie appears to manifest transnationalism in greater depth, reflecting its debt to a production and distribution system funded by the overseas capital of the diasporic Chinese. The genre is the most exportable item of the Hong Kong film industry. The case of *Legend of a Fighter* shows the Hong Kong film industry's desire to accommodate the Japanese market, which was an important market in the 1980s, although, as the critic Sek Kei pointed out in a review of the film, the love–hate relationship between China and Japan it portrays would have nurtured doubts as to how the Japanese audience would receive it.[10] Nevertheless, the desire to penetrate transnational markets was, and remains, a consistent trait in the kung fu cinema.

It is no accident that all three kung fu personalities, Sammo Hung, Yuen Wo-ping and Jackie Chan, have now worked or appeared in Hollywood movies. Chan became a star playing the Chinese buffoon in Yuen's *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978) and *Zui quan* (*The Drunken Master*, 1978) but his films since have shifted away from the early Republican China settings that were characteristic of most kung fu movies to present-day settings of modern Hong Kong and other countries. Chan's career might have relied on historicist

features of nationalism, which Gina Marchetti places within a binary of colonialism versus Chineseness:

> Sometimes, Chan's characters represent bodily the forces of colonialism. He plays royal Hong Kong police officers and international spies at the service of Western powers. At other times, he appears to be an emblem of authentic 'Chineseness,' chauvinistically celebrating the superiority of Chinese culture and the power of Chinese kung fu.[11]

Chan has quite obviously shifted away from this facet of 'Chineseness' as a concession to the forces of transnationalism in a recent series of movies, and Marchetti makes the point that Chan now seems to exemplify the 'absence of race, ethnicity, and nation found in postmodern theory. He exists at the cusp of the postmodern and the postcolonial, and he can be read as one or the other depending on the circumstances of exhibition and reception'.[12]

The kung fu genre now exists at the same cusp, put there by the circumstances of transnational production involving global capital and its networks of distribution, as may be witnessed by the Hollywood films of Jet Li and Jackie Chan, and by Hollywood's appropriation of the genre as exemplified by the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix* (1999), choreographed by Yuen Wo-ping. Ironically, while I said earlier that the rise of the kung fu movie displaced the *wuxia* movie, the process of transnationalism has probably brought the *wuxia* movie back to the same fold as the kung fu genre, a point that will become clearer as I discuss *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in the next chapter.

The Hong Kong New Wave and *Wuxia*

The New Wave was instrumental in reviving *wuxia* in the 1980s and 1990s as a genre with 'art film' elements seen from within the mainstream industry. Patrick Tam's *The Sword*, based on a Huang Ying novel, is a splendid example of the New Wave's engagement with the genre. The film features some of the most stylish swordplay ever designed and choreographed in the genre (the work of martial arts director Ching Siu-tung) as a way of demonstrating novel techniques reemphasising swordplay as the fundamental style of fighting in *wuxia*. In terms of the plot, the swordplay is a sign of the aristocratic, almost literary nature of the sword and the kind of mental anguish and tragedy it can generate. Wang Yu's *The Sword* tried much the same approach in the early 1970s; but the difference is that Tam's *The Sword* is a more elegant piece of work and its swordplay is definitively brilliant, demonstrating therefore how it has advanced the genre since Wang Yu.

The story of *The Sword* concerns a young swordsman Li Moran's search for an older retired swordsman Hua Qianshu reputed to be the best in the land in

order to test his skills on him. The events that unfold gradually reveal an elaborate plot conceived by another young swordsman Lian Huan to murder Hua Qianshu, framing Li Moran for the murder. There is also a personal motive of jealousy in that Li's childhood sweetheart, now married to Lian, is still in love with Li. Lian Huan gets hold of one of Hua's precious swords, but its twin is in the hands of Li Moran, necessitating a final duel between them.

The final duel is set inside a fine mansion, recalling the Chu Yuan-Gu Long films where duels are staged inside the halls and chambers of a huge mansion with swords ripping apart gauzes and screens, and the antagonists breaking up furniture and the partitions. Violence and beauty are integrated in action. Tam's handling of the sequence is much more concise in its editing and pace, a sign of how a New Wave director attempts to advance the genre in a more formalistic fashion. The swordsmanship of Tam's *The Sword*, plus the *mise en scène* and the editing, together with the fine performances of the principal actors, mark a high point in the genre, showing that it could now accommodate itself with the practices and viewpoints of a new generation of directors.

Though directors such as John Woo, Ann Hui, Ronny Yu, Johnnie To, Ringo Lam, Ching Siu-tung, and Clara Law, who all roughly fit into the rubric of the New Wave, have all made *wuxia* films, I will focus in the paragraphs below on Tsui Hark and Wong Kar-wai as the two most significant practitioners in the New Wave's appropriation and appreciation of the genre. They are also the key directors in the postmodern cycle of the genre's production (the period from 1990 to 1995).

Tsui's association with the genre began in television where he first made his name with the TV adaptation of Gu Long's *Jindao qingxia* (*The Gold Dagger Romance*) in 1978, recognised by critics as the highpoint of the TV *wuxia* serials. Paradoxically, what distinguished this particular series was Tsui Hark's use of cinematic styles and techniques although the series was shot on video. Tsui was a young director who had just returned from the United States after graduating from film school. He seized the chance to show his mettle as a director with the series, revelling in the dark mysterious nuances of Gu Long's original narrative and stamping his own mark on the performances, the lighting, compositions, editing, and even the special effects. The film industry sat up and took notice. When Commercial Television (CTV), which produced *The Gold Dagger Romance*, closed down in 1978, Tsui promptly entered the movie industry, making his cinematic debut with *The Butterfly Murders*.

Right at the start of his career, Tsui Hark was experimenting with the concept of *wuxia* as a 'new form'. He recognised that the possibilities for innovation lay in the fantasy element present in the genre. 'There are many fantastic things in *wuxia*, many illusions. You can make it into any form or shape. I feel that the *wuxia* film is at this moment (1979) very limited', Tsui said.[13] Tsui consciously set out to 'modernise' the genre by modifying the period world of *The Butterfly*

Murders. His traditional knight-errant figures look like wandering Japanese samurai in some scenes, and like Roman gladiators battling in the arena in other scenes. Also, the character of the scholar who bears witness to the bizarre events depicted in the film is, according to Tsui, more like a modern journalist than a knight-errant detective with supernatural skills.[14] Tsui invented many gadgets, not least the butterflies as killing instruments, a feature that would not have been amiss in a science fiction type action movie but strikes an idiosyncratic presence in a *wuxia* movie (even in Chu Yuan's 1976 *The Web of Death*, featuring supernaturally deadly spiders, it seemed somehow out of place).

Thus beginning with *The Butterfly Murders*, Tsui based his postmodern agenda on mutating *wuxia*'s fantasy tradition. This formula was applied to *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain*, based on the old school fantasy of Huanzhu Louzhu's 'Shu Shan' series. Tsui inducted the genre into the age of *Star Wars* by using that movie's special effects experts to bring the conceptual fantasy world of *Zu* into life on the big screen. The film's incorporation of 1980s state-of-the-art special effects technology and its association with science-fiction meant that fantasy was integrated into the genre without inducing the kind of debates about its harmful or superstitious aspects that affected its development in Shanghai during the late 1920s.

From the standpoint of new historicist criticism, Tsui Hark's *wuxia* films offer rich materials for other kinds of debates in allegory and political commentary. They betray a certain obsession with, first, China and the question of nationalism, second, Hong Kong and the question of 1997, and third, mythology and abstraction. As a director, Tsui's style is dynamic and excessive in its attention to fast action. By virtue of this style, it is often difficult to pinpoint where his films stand exactly but generically, they are allegories of some kind. Referring to the 'breathless pace and dizzying energy' of Hong Kong martial arts films in general, Bashkar Sarkar suggests that they could be read as 'unruly allegories':[15]

> In this, they become allegories of their context: anxieties over the new economic realities, the effects on social and cultural life, and the emerging political alignments are played out onscreen with hysterical abandonment. Hysteria often executes a parodic function against repressive social structures. In this case, the historical structures are being threatened by emergent ones that cannot be grasped and articulated easily. This constellation of ever-shifting grids is found to be oppressive in its effect; hence it becomes the object of parodic criticism. Unable to imagine the new structures adequately, the films articulate the anxieties by parodic repetitions of symbolic structures (myths).[16]

The 'constellation of ever-shifting grids' together with the references to 'parodic function', 'parodic criticism' and 'parodic repetitions', all suggest an extremely

unwieldy and unstable system of allegory indeed. Tsui's *wuxia* films lie at the core of this constellation. Hong Kong scholars have analysed the martial arts films of the 1990s as a 'cultural imaginary' of the territory's political and social history. Stephen Chan and Siu Leung Li look upon Tsui's films (specifically *The Butterfly Murders*, *Swordsman*, and *Once Upon a Time in China*) as allegories of 1997 in the pre-handover period and Hong Kong's ambivalent 'Chineseness'.[17] Such allegorical readings may be too reductionist and diachronic. Tsui's films may not neatly fit into the spotlight on the historical consequences of the 1997 question and the Hong Kong–China relationship, and not only because they are unruly allegories – they may after all really be an allegory on the history of the genre.

In *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain*, Tsui has questioned the historicist theme implicit in all martial arts literature of the supernatural hero who could deliver the common people from oppression and bring justice to the nation. This effectively is like a Symbolic Law of the genre. In Tsui's world, supernatural warriors are divided as much by conflicting loyalties and personal jealousies as are mortals. The internecine rivalry and strife in the world of the martial arts are indications of China's troubled history. The agonising quest for unity, as implied in the joining of the two swords which will save mankind from chaos, may indeed finally be seen as an allegory of Hong Kong's return to China, but I would argue that we should locate our discursive practices within the historicism of the genre.

In *Once Upon a Time in China*, Tsui sustains an ontological debate about 'real kung fu' by referring his audience to the fantasy of Wong Fei-hung as a nationalist hero with near-supernatural abilities in the martial arts. In the opening scene, we see Wong in this fantasy mode, snatching the lion's head from a lion dancer who has been mistakenly shot by French sailors and finishing the dance with acrobatic finesse, balancing perfectly as he leaps effortlessly onto the lanyards of a ship where the dance ceremony is taking place. The lion symbolises nationalism, and Wong's faultless dancing and balancing symbolises the heroic fantasy of China as a strong masculine nation.

However, the myth is put into question during the course of the film. Tsui presents Wong Fei-hung as a reformist figure in the world of martial arts, particularly when he is compared with and challenged by a northern rival, Master Yan (played by Yam Sai-koon). The northerner boasts that swords cannot pierce his body, but he is finally killed by bullets. As he dies in the arms of Wong Fei-hung, he utters, 'No matter how good we are in kung fu, we cannot withstand guns and bullets!' Tsui offers a critique of kung fu as a martial art, which has become outdated because of Western advances in technology. He underscores his critique by showing Master Yan reeling from the effects of the piercing bullets in slow motion. So emphatic is this effect that Siu Leung Li writes, 'It is a dominant characteristic of Tsui Hark to make direct thematic

statements in his films which are often to the degree of embarrassment, if not insult, to the audience.'[18] If indeed, the effect was to embarrass the audience, for the effect to work, it would have to be an audience long fed on the fantasy of kung fu as real fighting, which, in 1991 when the film was released, would be a historicist tradition ingrained for over forty years since the first Wong Fei-hung movie.

The theme of kung fu versus guns and bullets is of course not new in the genre. It was present in Zhang Che's *Baguo lianjun* (*The Boxer Rebellion*, 1975) and Lau Kar-leong's *Shiba ban wuyi* (*Legendary Weapons of China*, 1982). Like *Once Upon a Time in China*, both films deal with the rise of the Boxer Movement and its belief that the martial arts could make China strong again. Both Zhang Che and Lau Kar-leong revel in demonstrative displays of supposedly genuine kung fu skills: kung fu without the stigma of magic and superstition ('kung fu with magic is a hoax', says Lau's own character in *Legendary Weapons*). The theme of martial arts as an outdated practice that cultivates superstition among its practitioners therefore impeding science and progress is hinted at but finally subdued, and the films tend to indulge in ethnocentric posturing.

Kwai-Cheung Lo suggests that kung fu as an outdated technology is due to its 'metaphysical essence', which 'dislocates its self-same identity and moves away from itself as what it is'.[19] As such, the martial arts may be moulded into a 'dangerous ultranationalism that causes more catastrophic damage internally than it does to the outside world.'[20] The model for this argument is Tsui's *Once Upon a Time in China, Part II* (1992). It might be pointed out that the 'metaphysical essence' of kung fu can lead practitioners into several directions to seek its soul. The history of the martial arts cinema over the past twenty-five years suggests other contrasting instances. In the case of Lau Kar-leong's *Legendary Weapons*, there is a metaphysical celebration of martial arts for the sake of martial arts; in the case of Yuen Wo-ping's *Legend of a Fighter*, there is a lament that the nationalistic tenet of martial arts overrides the transnationalism of the martial arts which stresses an incorporation and fusion of styles from countries in the region; and in the case of Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* (Part I), Tsui's critique of kung fu may in fact have rested on the idea of kung fu as metaphysical essence, which in turn leads to the realisation that martial arts cannot be counted upon to save the country after all.

The metaphysical essence may have led the director to entertain the idea of both celebrating the martial arts as nationalistic impulse as well as to subvert such an impulse. The subversive intent is only potent when it flows out of the deliberate invocation of the martial arts as a celebration of nationalistic impulses in the genre (a contradictory notion which is applied in *Fearless*, for example, as I have explained in my discussion of the film on pp. 157–8). Thus the martial arts constitute a dialectic in nationalism. At the most, the

films – those by Tsui Hark as well as something like *Legend of a Fighter* and *Fearless* – show martial arts as a process of abstracting nationalism.

That Tsui did have a subversive intent is evident in the way that he presents Wong Fei-hung as a male, staunchly nationalistic hero, an image nurtured in the public mind by Kwan Tak-hing's portrayal of Wong Fei-hung over nearly thirty years, and appropriated by Tsui in mythic proportions in the opening scene that I have mentioned. He counterpoises this image with the introduction of a female foil, the character of Aunt Yee (Rosamund Kwan), who comes across as a 'destabilizing element' to counteract the 'masculinist notion of equating men with national strengthening', as Siu Leung Li has described her.[21] Aunt Yee is a western-educated Chinese woman who presents a strong antithetical image to Wong's as an indigenous male folk hero. Through Aunt Yee's guiding presence and her pronouncements on Chinese affairs, Wong becomes aware of Chinese weakness.

In his *wuxia* films, Tsui manipulates role-reversal and gender to subvert the discourse of nationalism and its corollary, male dominance. This objective is exemplified in the two *Swordsman* sequels, *Xiaoao jianghu II: Dongfang Bubai* (*Swordsman II*, 1992) and *Dongfang Bubai: Fengyun zai qi* (*The East Is Red*, 1993). These films revolve around a character known as Dongfang Bubai or 'Asia, the Invincible' (played by Brigitte Lin), originally an eunuch who, having mastered the secrets of a sacred scroll, is now able to fluctuate between masculinity and femininity. The figure of the eunuch as a typical villain of new school martial arts movies is transformed into a beautiful mutating spider-woman with the power to spin webs from her fingertips to trap and disempower her enemies. The spider-woman is transformed into a tyrant seeking dominance of the world of the *jianghu* but because she falls in love with the hero (portrayed by Jet Li), finally dies a martyr for love.[22]

Asia the Invincible's sexual ambiguity threatens the image of male heroism, and reverses the roles of good and evil stereotypes, so that the swordsman-hero ultimately loses his reason for being. The hero may in fact be Asia the Invincible, whose passage throughout the movie is one of unpredictable character mutations, bending genders and good and evil stereotypes. Tsui alludes to new school movies by King Hu, such as *Dragon Inn* and *A Touch of Zen*, and to Jin Yong's novels, but he has a disconcerting habit of twisting his homage around like a spinning top. The form of the new school *wuxia* may be twisted out of shape but it still settles down within the circumference of the historicist genre. Tsui did not just confine himself to the new school, as his versions of the old school novel *Shushan jianxia* (*The Chivalrous Swordsmen of the Szechwan Mountains*) by Huanzhu Louzhu attest to – Tusi's films are *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain* and its sequel, *Shushan zhengzhuan* (*Legend of Zu*, 2001).

Tsui's 1992 remake of Hu's *Dragon Inn* follows this same principle. The inn is a 'black inn', meaning a disreputable inn that services smugglers or bandits

and where unsuspecting travellers are killed, cooked and served to customers, which is actually the setting of Hu's *Anger* (the 1975 Shaw Brothers film *The Black Tavern* also takes place in just such a setting). The proprietress, Jade (played by Maggie Cheung), is a nymphomaniac who lures men into her boudoir, kills them, then pushes them down a chute into the kitchen where a Tartar butcher stands ready to carve up the corpse and cook up the meat into dumplings for customers.

The character of Jade is seditious in relation to new school notions of female knight-errantry. Tsui submits his male hero Zhou Huai'an (played by Tony Leung) to the same sexual dilemma that Lingwu Chong suffers in *Swordsman II*. Though Zhou is in love with the Brigitte Lin character, he marries Jade in order to extract from her the whereabouts of the secret passageway by which his party, stranded in the inn and surrounded by the *dongchang*, may escape. Jade and the Tartar butcher turn out to be the saviours of Zhou in the final duel with the eunuch Cao Shaoqin (Donnie Yen). The butcher uses his meat-shaving cleaver to defeat the eunuch: with lightning speed he pares an arm and a leg to the bone. The scene plays like a caricature of the final duel in Hu's *Dragon Inn*.

In *The Blade*, the one-armed hero meets his opponent, known as the 'Flying Dragon', who had killed his father, and rushes forward holding his father's broken blade, unleashing a series of whirling volleys like a top spinning around 'Flying Dragon'. The one-armed swordsman's whirling style of fighting is a pointed tribute to Bai Ying's 'Whirlwind Swordsman' in *The Valiant Ones*. The character, however, is based on Zhang Che's *The One-Armed Swordsman* (1967), and *The Blade* reworks Zhang's film by making it more intense. Tsui constructs the whole last sequence on the element of speed, seeking to distinguish himself by being faster than anyone else in the *wuxia* genre. The hero taunts Flying Dragon with cries of 'Faster! Faster!' as he accelerates his whirling therefore disorienting the dragon's sense of his own powers, particularly his ability to fly. It is as if speed has replaced the fantasy ingredient of flight in the postmodern *wuxia* cinema. Tsui is posing a clear dichotomy between realism and fantasy. Apart from being faster than Zhang Che or King Hu, Tsui's concept of realism is also more radical than the new school's – being more ferociously violent. Tsui may in fact be challenging himself to make his action scenes faster and deadlier than the new school's ever were. The result is an exhilarating disorientation of our sense of *wuxia* cinema.

The film contains complex explications of new school obsessions including Zhang Che's *yang gang* theory of masculinity and the realism versus fantasy issue – the new school's emphasis on 'realistic violence' as opposed to the old school's emphasis on the fantastic. The final action sequence is a culmination of these theories and ideas of the new school, as well as a tribute to King Hu and Zhang Che. First of all, the broken blade as a trope of castrated masculinity is used by Tsui to question the relevance of Zhang's obsession with macho

heroism in the postmodern age, and points once again to a critique of the genre mythology based on the symbolism of the sword (cf. Wang Yu's *The Sword* and Patrick Tam's *The Sword*).

The blade is of course a different kind of weapon from the sword but its symbolism in terms of the virtues and principles of knight-errantry is the same (if not in terms of social class). Juanita Zhou has pointed out that the blade, as opposed to the sword, is 'by far the most common, the most simple, the most direct, and the most effective, hence, brutal weapon' in the armoury of knights-errant.[23] The blade is therefore an effective insignia of realism, and the hero's whirling style of bladesmanship forces Flying Dragon to fight on the hero's terms. Flying Dragon is so named because he can ostensibly fly, but Tsui does not allow him to do so in the manner of the flying swordsman of the fantasy convention. Rather, Flying Dragon flies with the aid of ropes.

Tsui's reflection on the reality versus fantasy issue is further illustrated by his musings on the concept of the *jianghu* via the off-screen narration of his naïve female protagonist, whose question 'What is *jianghu*?' turns the film into a psychoanalytical puzzle since she is the cinematic narrator, the implied author of the piece. This is a question that has appeared before in a film connected with Tsui Hark, in *Swordsman III: The East Is Red* (1993), but there it is a question posed by invading foreigners seeking territory and colonial rights. In *The Blade*, it is a question that turns the genre in on itself. 'I don't know what the *jianghu* is', says the character in *The Blade*, 'it is many places and dialects, where justice is hard to define'. The girl's quest to understand what the *jianghu* is gives the director a pretext to deconstruct the historicist concept of the *jianghu* as a Utopia where romantic-chivalric knights-errant rescue ladies and do good deeds. Tsui depicts instead a Heterotopia populated by bandits, prostitutes and predatory hunters catching animals (and humans) with wolf-traps. Here we have a vision of grotesque realism, a marketplace of almost festive violence.

Tsui's bleak vision of the *jianghu* may fruitfully be compared with Wong Kar-wai's interpretation of the same *jianghu* imaginary in *Ashes of Time* (1994). Here, the characters are a conglomeration of bedraggled *xia* whose intersecting relationships relate to the past, symbolised by their memories of the women whom they love. The women's haunting presence, whether existing in the minds of the swordsmen or present in reality with them, symbolise the end of chivalry. The romantic dreams of knight-errantry are diminished by betrayal, jealousy, infidelity or even schizophrenia, in the case of the Brigitte Lin character whose personality is split into male and female sides, reminding one of Dongfang Bubai in *Swordsman II*, though not strictly in the same transgender class. In this *jianghu*, swordsmen wander for selfish motives. No longer are they knights-errant who fight for the ideals of chivalry and justice. They drift into the desert where one of their kind, Ouyang Feng (Leslie Cheung), acts as a middleman for

swordsmen who sell themselves as rented killers. 'Even the best swordsmen must eat', says Ouyang, a hero whose world-weariness if not cynicism foreshadows Chow Yun-fat's Li Mubai in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

The end of chivalry in *Ashes* is figurative of Hong Kong's state of mind in the transitional period before its reversion to Chinese sovereignty, as Stephen Chan has suggested. 'With *Ashes of Time* we are thrown into a world not of generic heroism, but one where the erosion of all heroic values had just completed its transitional historical course', writes Chan.[24] The context here is the Chinese government's crackdown in Tian'anmen Square on 4 June 1989 and Hong Kong's state of anxiety over the future following this incident. The 'erosion of all heroic values' is perhaps an overstatement, in retrospect, but the anxiety over 'generic heroism' is real enough.

The *jianghu* in *Ashes of Time* (and one might add in *The Blade* as well) is a trope for Hong Kong itself, where 'neither the urge for unification nor the value of coherence can be realised'.[25] Juanita Zhou, in an astute analysis, states that the film is 'no doubt a timeless metaphor which emerged at the historic moments of the end of the millennium and the end of Hong Kong's colonial phase' and that 'in the face of the uncertainty of the future of the human race in general and the Hong Kong people in particular, Wong offers his own resolution and conclusion of the future of the Chinese society with his examination of the tragedy and salvation of the Chinese intelligentsia'.[26] Thus the film is 'an introspection of the intelligentsia' which actually ends 'on an optimistic and heartening note'. 'Eventually, the intelligentsia . . . pull themselves together with the power of their minds, and divest themselves of their melancholy by confronting their past with their memory, hence they conquer'.[27]

If one sees *Ashes of Time* as a *wuxia* film, there is ample room to consider its value as a romantic melodrama within the confines and generic conventions of *wuxia*. The film is one of the most intriguing of *wuxia* films for its literary disposition telling several love stories with different narrators, all of whom are tormented by personal sorrow and loss – the very essence of the romantic hero.[28] It offers multiple perspectives on male and female protagonists, of whom the men are roving knights-errant and the women are love mates who are thoroughly displaced by the men's wanderings. Of the women, there is only one obvious female knight-errant figure, Murong Yin (Brigitte Lin), but her sexual identity is ambivalent such that she has a male personality, Murong Yang. It is interesting to compare her with Ainu and Chun Yi from *Intimate Confessions*, and to speculate on how the character may be a composite of the two figures from that film as we recall the line, 'We are one and the same'. Murong Yin and Murong Yang symbolise the ongoing dialectic between masculinity and femininity in *wuxia* ever since the appearance of the female knight-errant figure in Tang dynasty *chuanqi* stories; and of course in the late Qing novel *A Tale of Heroic Lovers*, the character of Thirteenth Sister is basically torn between her

(masculine) mission of revenge and her (feminine) role as a woman who must adjust to being the second wife of a young scholar.

Although Wong's film is commonly perceived as a rather unconventional *wuxia* movie or in fact not a *wuxia* movie at all, it is in reality a revisionist work that is ultimately rather faithful to the genre if not to its source, Jin Yong's novel *Shediao yingxiong zhuan* (*The Legend of the Condor Heroes*, aka *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*), adapted several times before in cinema and TV. Wong chose not to follow the plot of the dense novel and essentially borrows several characters from the novel for his own narrative purposes. Yet, the film's sprawling structure containing many lines of narratives told by different characters, each with their own back story seemingly unconnected from episode to episode, is typical of the old and new schools of *wuxia* literature. Wong makes full use of this novelistic convention to inject his own postmodern critique of the new school genre by constructing his own literary monologues around the characters stemming out of the novel. In the film, they become their own narrators and seemingly dislodge themselves from the novel.[29]

The film's structure is a series of vignettes based on monologues mainly spoken by Leslie Cheung's Ouyang Feng nicknamed Dongxie ('Evil East'), though the film, as indicated by its Chinese title, counterpoises him with another ostensible lead character, Huang Yaoshi (played by Tony Leung Ka-fai), nicknamed Xidu ('Malicious West'). Juanita Zhou has convincingly argued that the film 'functions as the prehistory of the history of Ouyang Feng' and that as such his interior monologue 'runs throughout the film' providing us 'with insights on the behaviours and motivations of the other characters he encounters'.[30] Huang Yaoshi and Tony Leung Chiu-wai's knight-errant, who is going blind, are given monologues which are 'qualitatively insignificant' but 'seems to challenge the thematic and aesthetic integrity of Ouyang Feng's point of view'.[31] The monologues are spoken offscreen and sometimes emanate from the characters onscreen, and each segment of narrative appears to interconnect seamlessly through the inter-relationships of the characters and the introductions of supporting personalities connected in one way or another with the two lead characters of the title.

The film works as a visualisation of monologues as well as a series of textual narratives in their own right. The focal point is a desert tavern, the meeting place of the *jianghu*. *Ashes of Time*, like many *wuxia* films of this period, including Tsui's *Swordsman* series and *The Blade*, and Ronny Yu's *Baifa monü zhuan* (*The Bride with White Hair*, 1993), is best seen as a discourse on the abstract concept of the *jianghu* (in reply to the question, 'What is *jianghu*?') An interesting comparison can be made between *Ashes* and Yu's *The Bride with White Hair*, which is a rather standard adaptation of Liang Yusheng's novel as opposed to Wong's radical paring down of Jin Yong's novel. *The Bride with White Hair* also stars Leslie Cheung and Brigitte Lin as two tragic lovers from

two opposing schools whose relationship compels them to leave the *jianghu* but who are inevitably pulled back into it by vengeful forces. These forces constitute a powerful homogenising energy at the core of the *jianghu* even though they are at odds with each other. The film's most memorable element is its pair of quarrelsome Siamese twin villains, one male the other female, who are destroyed at the end by the hero (Leslie Cheung) separating them with his sword. The violent split is symbolic in that it shows the hero's desire to split from the *jianghu*.

Both Leslie Cheung's hero Zhuo Yihang and Brigitte Lin's Lian Nishang are almost carbon copies of Ouyang Feng and Murong Yin inasmuch as they are wearied by the incompatibility between the *jianghu* and their better natures, their romantic hearts. *The Bride with White Hair* and *Ashes of Time* both find a common ground in the *jianghu* through their characters' romanticism and their fixations on revenge and killing. One can therefore call *Ashes of Time* a rather typical *wuxia* film – not that it is on the same level as *The Bride with White Hair*, but that it is conjoined to it in terms of historicist themes and settings; it then quarrels with its other body, as it were. Wong Kar-wai engages with the genre and disengages from it at the same time to resolve the contradictions of human identity, *qing* (emotion), and the propensity for violence in the *wuxia* world. In his idiosyncratic treatment, the genre appears to open up dimensions of narrative strategies and methods hitherto untapped.

Conclusion

The rise of kung fu in the beginning of the 1970s effectively displaced the *wuxia* genre, as symbolised by the sensational success of *The Big Boss* and the commercial failure of *A Touch of Zen* in 1971. A major factor in the remarkable growth of the kung fu movie was its profusion of fresh talent from Bruce Lee to Lau Kar-leong, to Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Jet Li and Donnie Yen, and its ability to accommodate contemporary forms and trends. In the cinema, *wuxia* seemed more restrained by its historicist form but directors such as Chu Yuan and later, the New Wave group of Tsui Hark, Ching Siu-tung, Patrick Tam and Wong Kar-wai ushered it into the postmodern age. *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* is a watershed intervention into the genre but arguably, it did not go far enough in exploring the female knight-errant's psychoanalytical and metaphysical complexes of sexual self-fashioning. It seems limited by the historicist theme of revenge, and therefore the genre itself appears self-fulfilled while the sexual subtext is only an indulgence designed to entertain the audience. Thus it lacks the depth of *A Touch of Zen*.

The New Wave work, Tsui Hark's in particular, is darker, compulsive and excessive but more allegorical in an open fashion (*The Butterfly Murders*, *The Blade*) and self-questioning of nationalistic impulses (*Once Upon a Time in*

China). *Ashes of Time* stands out as an unusual work, but for all its postmodern deconstruction of *wuxia* narratives, it is ultimately an achingly nostalgic tribute to heroic values and the romance of knight-errantry. The New Wave directors may have effected radical changes on *wuxia* but as the genre entered the new millennium, it seems even more of an old warhorse, resuscitating myths of knight-errantry (*Crouching Tiger*) and the hero's duty and bond with the state (*Hero*), which I will now go on to examine in the next chapter. In other words, the more *wuxia* changes, the more historicist it seems to be.

Notes

1. Interview with Sha Yung-fong, San Francisco, 24 March 2001.
2. For a chronological rundown on Union's history and its productions, see Huang Ren (ed.), *Lianbang dianying shidai*.
3. Yu Dayou is based on a real historical figure in the Ming period, a famous military man who wrote a manual on staff fighting entitled *Jian jing* ('The Sword Classic'). For more on Yu Dayou, see Meir Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery*, pp. 64–65, 68.
4. See David Desser, 'Making Movies Male', p. 19.
5. Ibid., p. 19.
6. Ibid., p. 20.
7. See Chen Mo, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi*, p. 173.
8. See 'Liu xing hudie jian, Zhongguo jiaofu shi de wuxia pian' ('The Killer Clans: Chinese Godfather-style *Wuxia* Film'), *Nanguo dianying* ('Southern Screen'), No. 217, March 1976, pp. 42–43.
9. I am indebted to Wing Chun master David Petersen for pointing this out.
10. See Sek Kei, *Shi Qi yinghua ji 7: shiba ban wuyi* ('Sek Kei's Collected Film Reviews, Vol. 7: The Eighteen Styles of Martial Arts') (Hong Kong: Sub-Culture Press, 1999), pp. 109–110.
11. Gina Marchetti, 'Jackie Chan and the Black Connection', p. 154.
12. Ibid., p. 156.
13. 'Die bian shi weilai zhuyi shi wuxia pian' ('The Butterfly Murders: A Futuristic *Wuxia* Film'), *Dianying shuangzhou kan* ('Film Biweekly'), No. 13, 5 September 1979, p. 34.
14. Ibid., p. 34.
15. Bashkar Sarkar, 'Hong Kong Hysteria: Martial Arts Tales from a Mutating World', in Esther C. M. Yau (ed.), *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 159–176, esp. p. 170.
16. Ibid., p. 171.
17. See Stephen Ching-kiu Chan, 'Figures of Hope and the Filmic Imaginary', pp. 486–514; Siu Leung Li, 'Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity', pp. 515–542. In their book, *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), Stokes and Hoover fundamentally adopt the 'allegory of context' approach, linking postmodern Hong Kong cinema's subtexts and themes with the territory's simultaneous development of early and late capitalism.
18. See Siu Leung Li, 'Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity', p. 536.
19. Kwai-Cheung Lo, '*Once Upon a Time*', p. 94.
20. Ibid., p. 94.
21. Siu Leung Li, 'Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity', p. 535.
22. For an assessment of the character and the transgender politics in *Swordsman II*,

see Helen Hok-sze Leung, 'Unsung Heroes: Reading Transgender Subjectivities in Hong Kong Action Cinema', in Pang and Wong (ed.), *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, pp. 81–98, esp. pp. 83–90.
23. See Juanita Huan Zhou, 'Ashes of Time: the Tragedy and Salvation of the Chinese Intelligentsia', *Asian Cinema*, 10:1, Fall 1998, 62–70, esp. p. 66.
24. Stephen Chan 'Figures of Hope', p. 500.
25. Ibid., p. 500.
26. Juanita Zhou, 'Ashes of Time', pp. 67–68.
27. Ibid., p. 67.
28. For a rundown of the different narrators and their respective love stories, see Ya-chen Chen, 'As Simple as an Egg: Lessons about Love in Ashes of Time', *Asian Cinema*, 17:2, Fall/Winter 2006, 84–102.
29. Juanita Zhou has examined how the film is connected or not connected with the novel through its characters. See Zhou, 'Ashes of Time', in particular pp. 62–63.
30. Ibid., p. 63.
31. Ibid., p. 64.

7. *WUXIA* BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND TRANSNATIONALISM

We now reach the concluding chapter of this monograph to examine the status and nature of the *wuxia* genre in its present development. In the new millennium, we see the genre's tendency to manifest as made-in-China historicist blockbusters mixing the epic form with *wuxia*. Examples are Tsui Hark's *Legend of Zu* (2001), *Qi jian* (*Seven Swords*, 2005), Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), He Ping's *Tiandi yingxiong* (*Warriors of Heaven and Earth*, 2004), Chen Kaige's *Wuji* (*The Promise*, 2005), Feng Xiaogang's *Yeyan* (*The Banquet*, 2006), Jacob Cheung's *A Battle of Wits* (2006), Peter Chan's *The Warlords* (2007), Ching Siu-tung's *Jiangshan meiren* (*An Empress and the Warriors*, 2008), and John Woo's *Chibi* (*Red Cliff*, first instalment 2008, second instalment upcoming at the time of writing).

Having been grafted onto the period epic, *wuxia* becomes a showcase of Chinese history, seeking to be universally accepted while at the same time locating itself within the historicist confines of the nation-state. In this chapter, I examine how *wuxia* in the new millennium shifts back and forth between two currents, nationalism and transnationalism, and in the process, question how the genre's characteristics and themes are refashioned or remain the same. The film that initiated the whole process was *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, released in 2000, and which became the first Chinese film to score a huge success at the box-office in the West.[1] Directed by Ang Lee, a Taiwanese director long resident in the United States who makes both Hollywood films and Chinese-language films shot in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, Lee is well

situated in handling and orchestrating the currents and counter-currents of Chinese nationalism and transnationalism. In discussing *Crouching Tiger*, different scholars have defined these movements as a 'global-local alliance', or as 'cultural migrancy'.[2] In using these terms, the scholars address issues of cultural translatability of the East for the consumption of the West but fundamentally neglect the interactions of nationalism and transnationalism, which are the currents that drive and problematise alliances of globalisation and cultural migrancy. I will proceed below to analyse *Crouching Tiger* as a problematical, albeit successful, example of the transnationalisation of the genre. The unprecedented transnational success of *Crouching Tiger* has raised questions of cultural authenticity, orientalism (or self-orientalism), and 'Chineseness' – all issues that will be discussed below. I then go on to examine Zhang Yimou's *Hero*, a work that has been put through the grinder of transnationalism but the resulting output of which is seen as a film affirming nationalism or the concept of the nation-state.

Hero was China's own response to *Crouching Tiger*, and it is much more political and allegorical, raising concerns about nationalism and the perception of *wuxia* as a reactionary vehicle of the state. Yet transnationalism is a process that entails the downplaying of Chineseness and the concept of the nation-state, or actually rewriting them through the methodology of self-orientalism and historicism. Is transnationalism best understood as a counter-response to nationalism, 'a way to rid the control of the nation-state', as Hsiao-hung Chang has put it?[3] I will show that *Hero*'s perceived nationalism is a discursive space of ambiguity that can be deemed transcendent of the concept of nationalism.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Model of Transnational *Wuxia*

Like the Hong Kong New Wave's approach to *wuxia*, *Crouching Tiger* reconfigures new school conventions, though less radically than in Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time* and Tsui Hark's *The Blade*. It evokes the new school films of King Hu in more respectful tones than Tsui Hark's evocations in his remake of *Dragon Inn* or in *The Blade*. It reconstructs the novel by Wang Dulu (1909–1977), an author who bridges the old and new schools, somewhat more reverently than Wong Kar-wai's deliberate obfuscations of traditional *wuxia* narrative in the case of his adaptation of a Jin Yong novel. On the surface, the film suggests a return to the fundamentals of *wuxia* – not only the fantasy of the supernatural hero but also the quest for *xiayi* or righteousness and chivalric behaviour. Ang Lee, however, injects his own ironic re-workings of the new school's heroic tradition and its clear division of good and evil stereotypes by guiding the film more towards the direction of a female knight-errant movie.

The film's central female knight-errant figure is Yu Jiaolong – in the English subtitles, she is renamed 'Jen', a fabrication about which I will have more to say

below, but for now I will hereafter refer to her as Jen. Though there is another female knight-errant figure in the person of Michelle Yeoh's character Yu Shu Lien (Yu Xiulian, in Pinyin), Jen is the film's most important protagonist, and all the more so because she is an ambivalent character in that she is the hero but also the villain. I will have more to say about her ambivalence which works out in other ways but primarily, she confuses the stereotypes of good and evil. Jen is secretly trained in the Wudang school of martial arts by an evil governess (played by Zheng Peipei), a woman wanted by the law and sought after by Li Mubai as the object of his vengeance for having killed his master. She steals Li Mubai's 300-year-old Green Destiny sword, which can cut through metal without leaving a mark.

To Jen, the Green Destiny rightfully belongs to her because having mastered the highest form of the art of Wudang (without the knowledge of her teacher), she considers herself the only person worthy of owning such a sword. This theme, being sourced from Wang Dulu's novel, is a typical one in the genre. It is so generic that *Crouching Tiger* bears superficial resemblances to a 1967 Shaw Brothers movie, *Dao jian* (*The Rape of the Sword*), directed by Yue Feng, where the aristocratic heroine, a general's daughter, also named Jiaolong (but with a different surname), is taught the martial arts by her governess who has hidden her real identity in order to penetrate the mansion of a despotic prince to recover the Green Frost Sword, stolen from her master by an evil disciple. Jiaolong later falls in love with a bandit, named Luo Yihu ('winged tiger') – in *Crouching Tiger*, Jen falls in love with Luo Xiaohu ('little tiger').[4]

Based on the central premise of the theft of the sword, *Crouching Tiger* becomes a thesis on the moral conduct and behaviour of the female knight-errant figure. Jen can be seen as a variation of Yang Huizhen in *A Touch of Zen*, which concerns itself with the morality of Yang's mission of revenge and the moral consequences of violence. Yang Huizhen and Jen are both ambiguous figures because of their respective moral dilemmas, but it could be argued that Jen lends herself more to postmodern ambiguity, and indeed, Leon Hunt states that she is 'the quintessential postmodern heroine, her loyalties uncertain and unfixed'.[5]

Jen's quintessential postmodernism is demonstrated in her relationship with Shu Lien, which is a relationship that 'shifts between that of sworn enemies and sworn sisters', as Kenneth Chan tells us,[6] and in her relationship with Li Mubai, which is an uncertain bond between master and disciple. Thus in these relationships we can discern the shifting responses of the filmmakers towards the genre and its archetypes, in particular the female knight-errant. The filmmakers appear to have it both ways in each relationship which may be symbolically seen as a feminine sort of approach that appeals in a postmodern globalised environment. In any case, the film's gradual focus on Jen is a sign of the filmmakers' intentions to derail the male heroic tradition, not an unworthy endeav-

our in the genre nor a new one; but Lee's 'feminine approach', designed to appeal to Western audiences, is not without problems, as I will show below.

Jen's ambivalence as a character is reflected in the Green Destiny, a slender, elastic sword, which has been taken as a phallic symbol. Her theft of the sword 'is a usurpation of male power and a grave challenge to both male authority and male propriety', as Rong Cai has described it.[7] Since the sword is at the heart of *wuxia* in theme and action, the fight sequences convey nothing more than the ambivalence of Jen's character. The film delivers several exciting action sequences choreographed by Yuen Wo-ping, who is really the other auteur of *Crouching Tiger* as Christina Klein has pointed out.[8] As Klein has explained, the fight scenes are integrated with the narrative, 'express characters' feelings and desires, externalize their inner lives, and give physical shape to their relationships'.[9] Though Klein does not state that ambivalence is the key mood or sentiment of the fight sequences, Jen's involvement as the central protagonist invariably marks the sequences as ambivalent. Either her heroism or identity is questioned or hidden or the way the fights are fought can only bring about provisional and tentative outcomes.

The sword's flexible nature and its association with Jen also symbolises the quest for *xiayi*, a quest which Lee poses in terms of an equivocal master–disciple relationship between Li Mubai and Jen. She has mastered merely the technical aspects of the Wudang, whereas Li wants to impart to her its moral standards in order to make her worthy of possessing the sword. Their clash in the bamboo forest echoes the psychological dimension of their struggle. Commentators such as Klein and Kwai-Cheung Lo have characterised the clash in the bamboo forest as one of erotic desire.[10] However, *wuxia* has always tended to stress celibacy and strict morality, particularly where one is an older master and the other a younger disciple. Jen being a female no doubt complicates matters and the question of her sexuality and the hidden desire between her and Li Mubai are well taken.

In fact, the possibilities in Jen's hidden sexual roles, her transgender identity, are not fully explored at all in the film, as Tze-lan D. Sang has demonstrated in her study of the character's 'transgender body', more apparently described in the novel.[11] Her sexual identity being more amorphous, Sang states that the character yearns to 'break free of the fragile female norm and dominate others in a violent world'.[12] In the film, Jen is much more conventionally feminine and her hidden desire for Li Mubai (or his for her) must be couched in paternal master–disciple moral terms; thus her desire and her wish to be free clashes with the morality of the *wuxia* code as represented by Li. Jen flies from treetop to treetop, clinging to a bamboo and bending with it, movements which denote the obliquity of her moral character which Li Mubai is attempting to sway to his side. As Jen remains obstinate, Li casts away the Green Destiny, but she leaps after it, propelled by her own conviction that she morally deserves to own the sword.

Jen's leap in this scene foreshadows her final leap from the temple at Mount Wudang at the end of the film. In the novel, the character's leap is an act of penance for having caused her family's downfall by her reckless behaviour.[13] The legend goes that if a person is sincere in her penance, her faith will not only guide her to safety but also fulfil all her wishes. In the film, Jen has indirectly caused the death of Li Mubai (who does not die in the novel). She finally realises her moral shortfall, and her leap is a quest for redemption. Mount Wudang is the sacred mountain of Daoism, and by casting herself off it, Jen is not attempting self-oblivion but rather she is, metaphorically speaking, launching herself as a seeker on the path of the Dao, and to reach immortality. In contrast, Li Mubai has perished without reaching the bliss of enlightenment.

Ang Lee's embrace of the female knight-errant figure is a concerted effort to deconstruct the male heroic tradition. James Schamus, Lee's American partner, associate producer and co-writer of the film and the key creative collaborator of Ang Lee in judging which elements to keep and which to discard in making the film a transnational product, sums it up by saying that *Crouching Tiger* is about 'a crisis of cultural transmission'. The male master cannot find a male inheritor of his legacy leading to a breakdown of the transmission process, and it is Jen who finally 'figures it out'.[14] However, by racking the film's whole focus onto Jen, the filmmakers may have unconsciously made the film even more ambiguous. The figure of the female knight-errant is traditionally an ambiguous figure but in 'translating' the figure for a Western audience, she is seen as a completely fresh figure in Western eyes. A typical reaction of Western critics who are not versed in the tradition of the female knight-errant and martial arts cinema in Hong Kong was that 'it was *not common* to see women cast so prominently in action parts' (emphasis mine).[15] Such (mis)perception of the female knight-errant figure as an *uncommon* female project in martial-action cinema lends the film a totally mythical impression. It would seem that the female knight-errant has come out of a Chinese equivalent of Aladdin's lamp whereas in fact she is part of a long tradition in cinema and literature.

On a new historicist level, the female knight-errant is a cultural representation which can be reinterpreted through the ages and practically reinvented to suit the times and the global audience. In this way, she can be renewed and effectively spring out of a timeless vacuum and presented as the embodiment of 'the anachronous pre-existence of the political values and representational strategies of 1990s pop-feminism', as Fran Martin has put it in her analysis of the figure's appeal in the Western context.[16] Kenneth Chan points out that the film 'offers itself readily to feminist interpretations', but that the 'feminist elements in the film' allow for 'a certain ambiguity in the text' which attests to 'Lee's strategic configuration' of the same elements. Chan also asserts that the ambiguity 'is also a result of the overdetermined systems of film discourse, production, and consumption'.[17] Ambiguity is written into the film's architecture as a

result of its transnational circumstances of production: its complicated globalised financing, the input of an American (Schamus) in the writing process, the intermixtures of Taiwanese, Chinese and Hong Kong talent, the conscious effort to present itself as both a pan-Chinese film articulating what Shu-mei Shih calls a 'Sinophone' identity[18] and a film intended for a Western audience.[19]

In probing Jen's ambiguity through the 'overdetermined systems' of *Crouching Tiger*'s production, I think it is pertinent here to bring up the orientalism factor at work in the 'strategic configuration' of Jen as a pop-feminist-cum-knight-errant. Yeh and Davis remind us that Lee was accused of self-orientalising because of 'the calculation with which Chinese materials were packaged in Hollywood wrapping', but argue that 'such critiques do not help in understanding the intermingled layers of genre and national cinema, its transnational operation and cross-cultural apparatus'.[20] However, I would argue that orientalism is a part of the film's 'transnational operation and cross-cultural apparatus' since it is clearly a process or technique in the 'overdetermined' system of postmodernising globalism within which Ang Lee works, as I will attempt to demonstrate. My critique of orientalism seeks to understand it as *practice*, a kind of postmodern orientalism, in the intermingling of genre and transnationalism; and the film is admittedly much more subtle in its inscription of orientalism. One could possibly see it on the level of 'new ethnography', Rey Chow's take on Zhang Yimou's early films, which 'accepts the historical fact of orientalism and performs a critique of it by staging and parodying orientalism's politics of visuality'.[21] However, because *Crouching Tiger* is a *wuxia* fantasy which embraces rather than parody orientalism, I somehow doubt its efficacy as 'new ethnography'. I do think it is effective simply as 'postmodern orientalism'.

Lee's postmodern form of orientalism pervades the film in ways that are abstract and concrete, and I will attempt to show how. In the figure of Jen, it can simply be shown that orientalism manifests itself in the most concrete fashion – through the English subtitles. The name 'Jen' has no connection with the character's given Chinese name Jiaolong, which means 'pretty dragon', which therefore makes her the 'hidden dragon' of the title, a nuance that only the Chinese name could have conveyed to audiences. But along with other deliberate misuses in the transliterations of names, which are perhaps too trivial to list here,[22] it represents the function of orientalism which is to make intentional mistakes in order to sell the product in the context of the transnational market. The mistakes then become embedded in discourse and over time may even be taken as law. Orientalism as discourse 'is an epistemology of power', as Arif Dirlik cautions us.[23] Thus 'Jen' is now commonly regarded in English critical references to *Crouching Tiger* as the character Yu Jiaolong's 'name'. It is not only orientalist, but also a non-diegetic name.

What audiences do not realise is that the name 'Jen' actually alters the personality and identity of Yu Jiaolong, which is a much more masculine name as

symbolised by the 'dragon' in the name, substituting it with one that is more feminine-sounding but totally foreign. Ironically, while Ang Lee might have sought to displace the male heroic tradition by focusing on the female knight-errant figure, he is in reality offering a more conservative vision of Yu Jiaolong than she actually appears in the novel. The name Jen signifies Lee's adherence to the norms of heterosexual romance in the era of globalising postmodernism whereas Yu Jiaolong, the heroine of the novel, disrupted 'the heteronormative vision of the modernizing elite' in Republican China.[24] Lee's perceived 'femininity' is therefore determined by both heteronormative and orientalist demands.

On the more abstract level, the orientalism factor at work in *Crouching Tiger* underlies the cultural essentialism of *wuxia* that Ang Lee also sought to depict – his purported 'dream of China', a China that does not exist or exists only in 'boyhood fantasies'.[25] Such a dream vision of China falls squarely into the abstract cultural nationalism of the *wuxia* and kung fu genres, which I have discussed more fully in Chapter 5. Arif Dirlik reminds us that nationalism shares much 'with the culturalist procedures of orientalism, now at the scale of the nation',[26] and Lee's abstract nationalism implies the absorption of these 'culturalist procedures' as a means to convey signs and motifs in the *wuxia* genre to a Western audience. This is probably best understood as self-orientalism, which evoked 'suspicions of stereotyping, exoticism, traditionalism, and pandering to a Western gaze', as Kenneth Chan reminds us.[27]

The controversy that the film's practice of orientalism has aroused is really all about 'the epistemology of power' in the discourse on names, concepts, archetypes, and 'Chineseness'. On the issue of Chineseness, Ken-fang Lee states that the film 'calls forth a new cultural identity that de-essentializes home-bound Chineseness',[28] which may well be the case because Chineseness is compromised by self-orientalism. However, Lee's orientalism, and the question of Chineseness it evokes, is much more subtle and strategic, and it relates once again to the female knight-errant. I would say that the fact that *Crouching Tiger* is a female knight-errant movie makes it thoroughly Chinese inasmuch as the figure has a long historicist tradition. On this level, there is nothing culturally inauthentic about the film.

To be sure, its critical discourse over female empowerment and agency, as Kenneth Chan has argued, is ambiguous. Chan wonders 'if the centering of the women and their control of the film's action are attempts to write in female agency as feminist empowerment; or can the reinscription of the women in "walking the path of the (Daoist) way" be construed as their recommitment to the patriarchal order and its ideology?'[29] This ambiguity is not inauthentic either, nor is it something necessarily postmodern, because this is precisely the ambiguity of Thirteenth Sister from the novel *A Tale of Heroic Lovers* (Jen being a variation of Thirteenth Sister). It is also the ambiguity of Yang Huizhen

in *A Touch of Zen*, which of course is based on Pu Songling's 'Xianü'. It is the ambiguity of the heroines of Tang *chuanqi* tales. The female knight-errant is an ambiguous figure for nearly 2,000 years.

In truth, there is not much that is new or innovative about *Crouching Tiger*, which is an above-average *wuxia* film directed conservatively by Ang Lee. However, the female knight-errant figure as personified by Zhang Ziyi does exude a refreshing vigour; exactly the same kind of vigour that Zheng Peipei exuded in King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* back in 1966. She therefore constitutes the uplifting and restorative core of the film, emitting a sense of newness, and in this way, the female knight-errant represents the capacity and function of new historicism in reinterpreting a historicist figure which is often described in vague, mysterious terms. The film's real achievement is that it was able to transmit this figure across the globe, doing it so much more successfully than King Hu could manage with *A Touch of Zen* some twenty-five years ago. But perhaps the world was not ready then for a *wuxia* female knight-errant and the genre was even stranger than it is now.

Crouching Tiger's debt to *A Touch of Zen* has not been as fully acknowledged in the current discourse on Ang Lee's film. Christina Klein, for example, states that in directing *Crouching Tiger*, Ang Lee 'displays a selective accommodation to, and a creative entanglement with, the conventions of Hollywood cinema', citing the full integration of fight sequences into the narrative structure as Lee being influenced by the American musical genre. She continues,

> In most Hong Kong films, the first fight scene comes right away and the others follow in rapid succession. In *Crouching Tiger*, in contrast, the first fight scene takes place about fifteen minutes into the film. By delaying it for so long, Lee gives himself time to establish the diegetic world of Qing dynasty China, to set up the violent back story of the Green Destiny sword, and to introduce the long-simmering emotional tensions between his main characters.[30]

Hong Kong martial arts films have long been influenced by the musical, but in a Chinese Operatic way as well as the Hollywood way. In fact, most Hollywood musicals start off with a musical number right away and it would be fatal if a number had to wait fifteen minutes into the movie to get started. Thus *Crouching Tiger* goes against the convention of Hollywood musicals, and in fact, most Hollywood genre films. *Crouching Tiger*'s long exposition was probably influenced by *A Touch of Zen*, where the first proper fight scene took more than an hour to get started (and this could have been a factor in its box-office failure).[31] The fight sequences in *A Touch of Zen* were just as integrated, and I would argue, even more spectacular than Lee's sequences as dance.

Yet *A Touch of Zen* failed to accomplish a genuine transnational crossover

in the same way as *Crouching Tiger* and it is therefore argued that Ang Lee somehow 'dessentialized' the Chineseness of the genre, and, supposedly for this reason, the film succeeded among Westerners. I would argue that the film is as Chinese as *A Touch of Zen* because it is as wilfully entrenched in the aesthetic identity of the genre as Hu's film is. The Chineseness of *Crouching Tiger* is, on the one hand, part of the cultural essentialism of *wuxia*, and on the other hand, is 'radically hybridized . . . while still serving as a powerful "centralizing" force', as James Schamus has claimed of it.[32]

Crouching Tiger is primarily an aesthetic accomplishment demonstrating 'Chineseness' as something that is transnational. As Schamus has put it, 'at the end of the day, Ang and I do indeed want everyone in the world to be, in a non-trivial sense of the word, Chinese'.[33] To my mind, this is only possible if 'Chinese' is an abstract term, as in the idea of abstract nationalism that pervades the genre. Here the point to make is that it was the *wuxia* genre that could allow Lee and Schamus to make everyone Chinese: *wuxia* being more possessive of Chineseness in the non-trivial abstract sense than other genres and being the more credible vehicle to transmit this 'Chineseness' on a transnational level.

Crouching Tiger's transnational success signifies in the first instance, that *wuxia* could transcend national and cultural boundaries. Yet *wuxia* as a whole still remains embedded within a national, historicist form. Increasingly, as I have mentioned at the start of this chapter, *wuxia* is now a made-in-China product, as if being produced and shot in China confers legitimacy to the genre. In the process it has engendered a wave of huge *wuxia* productions that can only be described as historicist behemoths. Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) set the trend and while it is another attempt to replicate the success of *Crouching Tiger* by returning to the mould of a transnational production (financing by Miramax, the use of Hong Kong and Mainland talent working on locations in China, and shot by Australian expatriate cinematographer Chris Doyle), it actually works out as a response to *Crouching Tiger* and its vision of 'Chineseness' as a transnational concept (I will return to this later). *Hero* is transnational on the exterior, but in its interior essence, it is still subjected to the national and not less driven by national market imperatives as well. What is unique about *wuxia* in the contemporary era as the genre entrenches itself in the Chinese Mainland is precisely this juggling of transnationalism and nationalism.

China and the *wuxia* film

Since the 1980s, the *wuxia* movie has moved closer to its original base in China, signifying a historic closing of the circle. China, which banned the genre for purveying superstition and feudal thinking, now shapes up as the natural home of the genre. The country fulfils all the surface conditions for the making of *wuxia* movies, namely, the historical precedents, the locations, the speech (Mandarin),

the talent. It also serves to provide the concept of the national as a homogenising force of one of the principles of *wuxia* articulated by the author Jin Yong: 'the apex of *xia* is to serve the nation and the people' (*weiguo weimin, xia zhi da zhe*).

One key movie of the 1980s that pre-positioned China's claim of *wuxia* as a national genre was Ann Hui's *Romance of Book and Sword*, shown in two instalments in 1987, which was in fact based on Jin Yong's novel, and whose theme revolves around the idea of China as the all-encompassing nation of knights-errant of various ethnicities apparently searching for unity under a benevolent Han Chinese emperor – a project that remains unfulfilled because China is under Manchu rule. The plot hinges on the central desire of the Han Chinese to reclaim China from the Manchus and the discovery by the protagonist Chen Jialuo, leader of the Red Flower Society seeking to overthrow the Qing, that the Qing Emperor Qianlong is really a Han and in fact, his brother. The Red Flower members attempt to force Qianlong to take up their cause of Han reunification of China. The motivating spirit of the film, made in China as a co-production with a Hong Kong left-wing studio, was the reunification of Hong Kong with China in 1997 and while the film addresses the issue allegorically, the meaning of reunification is inherent in the relationship between Chen Jialuo and Qianlong, two blood brothers divided by separate loyalties. In the movie, reunification remains elusive marked by betrayal and ultimately a fallback on authoritarian might and self-justification (historically, of course, the Qing dynasty would last until the 1911 revolution toppled it).

In terms of *wuxia* development in China, many films were done on a co-production basis with Hong Kong talent and money in the 1980s and 1990s which took advantage of the country's locations and cheap labour. Chinese *wuxia* films made locally remain on the whole an unknown entity outside of China with few actually even released in Hong Kong. *The Shaolin Temple* (1982), directed by Zhang Xinyan, a Hong Kong director who worked throughout his career in the territory's left-wing film industry (an industry supported financially by China), is normally considered the turning point for the genre in the Mainland. A popular hit, it reintroduced the genre to a new generation of audiences in the Mainland who had no previous exposure to *wuxia* or kung fu films because they were banned for so long.

The Shaolin Temple is more appropriately a kung fu rather than a *wuxia* film, recycling clichés in both the kung fu and *wuxia* genres without offering anything new except Jet Li, a five-time *wushu* champion whose first film this was, and a cast of amateurs, all national *wushu* champions who went on to become movie stars and/or martial arts directors. The plot is a standard revenge tale, about a young man (Li) who enters the northern Shaolin Temple as a political refugee and becomes a monk imbibing all the martial arts skills taught there in order later to exact revenge on the man who killed his father. The narrative is

enlivened by the superior *wushu* techniques of Li, featuring northern Shaolin styles, one of the film's selling points to a Hong Kong audience who were until now more familiar with southern Shaolin kung fu.

After appearing in the follow-up to *The Shaolin Temple*, *Shaolin xiaozi* (*The Shaolin Kids*, 1984), a boisterously comic and musical rendition of the opposition between Shaolin kung fu versus Wudang swordfighting, meant more as a children's film, Li went on to make a third film *Martial Arts of Shaolin* (1986), reprising the motifs of revenge and Shaolin kung fu as epitomic of righteousness, justice and loyalty. *Martial Arts* is directed by Lau Kar-leong as a Hong Kong–China co-production, and it is Lau's unstinting energy in the *mise en scène* that makes this the best film of the trilogy. Its plot concerns Li's northern Shaolin monk acting in concert with a disciple of the southern Shaolin temple in Putian (Fujian province), together with a young woman dressed as a man, to assassinate a Manchu prince. They come together with the same mind, though unknown to each other, during the prince's birthday celebration in the Forbidden City, where Li joins the celebration as a lion dancer secretly waiting for the right moment to make his move against the villain, while his southern Shaolin colleague and the young woman also join the celebration in other roles, waiting for their own right moments to strike down the prince.

The whole sequence is a spectacularly choreographed piece of lion dancing, acrobatics and martial arts action materialising seamlessly from the celebratory portion of the scene. Lau's direction of the film might be over-emphatic, in the Hong Kong manner, but it works as an offsetting aesthetic riposte to the obviously touristy background in which the action sequences are set: the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, the Shaolin temple, and other scenic areas of China. The martial arts action actually *demands* to be seen in its own right as an aesthetic spectacle; and in this sense, China's relationship with the martial arts cinema in both its *wuxia* and kung fu traditions calls into question how both traditions may be integrated fully with the country itself without the kind of opposition between competing spectacles as demonstrated in *Martial Arts of Shaolin*. Such integration, I suggest, was perhaps best achieved through *wuxia* where historic spectacle blends with the spectacle of China – *wuxia* as the spectacle of the nation, as exemplified by a work such as *Hero* (which I will come to later).

Internally, the genre as developed by China's own filmmakers in the modern era has had a very short history, beginning only in the 1980s as the country opened itself up after its long period of isolation from the outside world. In re-adapting to the genre, Mainland filmmakers had to get to grips with its aesthetics and style in a self-fashioning attempt to incorporate *wuxia* within the mould of China's state-run cinematic system, and in the 1980s, it was the Fourth Generation directors who pursued such a task – directors such as Zhang Huaxun, Li Wenhua, Sun Sha, Zhang Zien. Their work largely demon-

strated the uneasy adjustments by Mainland filmmakers to the styles of *wuxia* and kung fu after a long period of genre ostracism.[34] For lack of space, I will pass over discussing these films here and perhaps take them up on another occasion. Chinese filmmakers in this period had to 'modernise' the genre before it could be fully accepted elsewhere (and most of the Fourth Generation *wuxia* films were not released outside of China). The rise of the Fifth Generation in the mid-1980s responded to the task of modernising Chinese cinema.

In the genre, the first film that gained international exposure was He Ping's *Swordsman of Double Flag Town*, released in 1990. Though He Ping did not graduate from the Beijing Film Academy, the alma mater of the Fifth Generation filmmakers,[35] he can be considered part of that generation who sought to modernise Chinese cinema and set trends themselves. He Ping began in the film industry by working his way up in the Xi'an Film Studio to become an assistant director. His debut work as director is *Swordsman of Double Flag Town* and with it, he signalled not only a personal affinity with *wuxia* but also the Fifth Generation's special kinship with the genre which would show up later in the work of Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige.

Thematically, *Swordsman* adopts a cynical rather than a romantic attitude towards knight-errantry. It questions the concept of *xia* selflessness and the whole idea of helping the poor and oppressed get rid of evil tyrants. The moral may well be one of self-reliance and self-strengthening but conveyed in such an offbeat anti-heroic manner that the film actively debunks the myth of *xia*. The central hero is a young boy, Haige, who goes to Double Flag Town on the instructions of his late father, to redeem a child bride, daughter of a crippled butcher. On the way, he meets a wandering swordsman in the desert and they strike up a friendship. The swordsman, named Shalifei (or Sandfly), boasts of his knight-errantry and promises to help Haige if he ever got into trouble. In Double Flag Town, Haige kills a man who tries to rape his fiancée and the dead man turns out to be the brother of the legendary bad guy Yidaoxian (One-Blow), who now seeks revenge.

Though naïve and apparently wet behind the ears, the boy is in fact a budding swordsman who practises the secret art of drawing swords through the control of inner breath or *qi*, taught by his father, once the supreme swordsman of the northwest. The boy wears two small swords strapped to his boots. The townspeople plead with him not to flee and instead help them kill One-Blow. Sandfly's help is now requested; he asks for money but only turns up after Haige has killed One-Blow in the final showdown. That Sandfly does not turn up to help Haige is the central disillusionment of the film of course (his justification is that he knew all along that Haige could kill One-Blow) and sums up the subversive approach of He Ping towards the myth of *xia*, though with Haige's stunning victory, another myth is perpetrated.

He Ping's other films in the genre, including *Riguang xiagu* (*Sun Valley*, 1994), a kind of sequel to *Swordsman*, and his later blockbuster *Warriors of Heaven and Earth*, extend his revisionist view of *wuxia* and rewriting myth. First, he sees *wuxia* as more of a Western in both geographic and cultural terms. What is interesting about his films is that they are generic but idiosyncratic, even eccentric models of knight-errantry. By seeking to move the genre away from the central plains and lush southern landscape of China and placing it firmly in the barren western geographic region along the path of the historic 'Silk Road', He's vision of *wuxia* is that of a multicultural, multiethnic social order, which impacts on the genre aesthetically, reworking fashions/costumes and even styles of combat. In this respect, *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* is He's most representative work, and the fact that it looks more like a transnational epic than a nationalist *wuxia* movie is its greatest charm and appeal.

Warriors is a marvellously executed *wuxia*-western adventure and it actually takes better advantage of the blockbuster mode to seamlessly integrate desert locations, sets of frontier towns and fortresses, props and artifacts, costumes mixing Western and Middle-Eastern styles, and even special effects, into its narrative. It is in short one of the few blockbusters in the current drive to marry *wuxia* with the epic form that actually works. The film tells the story of a Japanese warrior, originally an emissary sent to China during the Tang era, kept a virtual prisoner by the emperor but is given a chance to return to Japan on condition that he captures a mutineer, one Lieutenant Li (Jiang Wen). He sets out for the western region along the Silk Road to carry out his mission but in the course of the narrative, he is instead co-opted by Li into joining him, escorting a caravan to Chang'an, the capital. The caravan is attacked by bandits led by Master An (a charming villain, appealingly played by Wang Xueqi) who are after a Buddhist relic that has magical powers. In the exciting climactic battle set inside a fort, the relic is exposed and its magical powers unleashed.

He Ping masterfully orchestrates his elements to construct an epic that evokes not only the *wuxia* film but also the western, the desert adventure, and the *shenguai*-fantastic, with an ending that is somewhat reminiscent of the final Zen revelation in *A Touch of Zen*. Amazingly it pulls off the experiment in 'combining realism and fantasy', as He Ping has described it.[36] The director stages all the fight scenes realistically, indulging in the fantasy premise of the genre only very sparingly. *Warriors* differs from the historicist blockbusters of the Fifth Generation by being more sober-minded about fantasy but also by being more de-centric, locating the genre outside of its traditional domain. Its western locale is therefore more of an allegory of the transnational drive and imperatives of China in the age of globalisation, even if ultimately the film may be said to reinforce the historicist myth of *wuxia* through the fantastic premise of the

Buddhist relic helping to bring about a long reign of peace over China during the Tang Dynasty.

Hero: Model of Historicist *Wuxia*

I now come to Zhang Yimou's *Hero* and its appropriation of the historicist form of the genre to demonstrate the grandeur of history and myth. *Hero* is probably the first *wuxia* film in China to signify how the genre has reached its apex in the Mainland as a 'national form'. The film is in this way significant for its representation of history as well as its representation of knights-errant-cum-assassins as the movers or agents of history.

However, the methodology of the film relies as much on orientalism as on evocations of ancient Chinese history. Orientalism and historicism are interlinked, following Said who declares that 'one of the legacies of orientalism, and indeed one of its epistemological foundations is historicism'.[37] From Said's point of view, historicism was a way of exerting European superiority over history through the methodology of orientalism. Arif Dirlik has clarified the linkage between historicism and orientalism as a process of self-orientalism and the epistemology that emerges from this is 'a representation of essentialized culturalist characteristics': through the methodology of self-orientalism, the 'essentialized culturalist characteristics' substitute time and history as lived experience with a mythic, dehistoricised conception of history.[38]

The historicist subject of *Hero* is that the hero of the film must be a knight-errant who is an agent of history, but, as Jia-xuan Zhang has asked, who is the hero of the piece?[39] This is of course its central puzzle. In the historian Sima Qian's view, the assassin is worthy of being a hero since such a man does a service to the nation by ridding it of tyrants and despots. Invariably the hero is a man rather than a woman, though in the film, there is a female assassin, played by Maggie Cheung, whose purpose of existence is to assassinate the tyrant but significantly, she doesn't even get close to her target.

The film gives us several knights-errant who are possible heroes. If we define a knight-errant as someone who is a master of the sword, the supposed villain of the piece, the Qin emperor who founded China as a nation, can be considered a knight-errant, and thus a hero, since he is shown to be a formidable swordsman himself. The film can be seen as a thesis about the sword, its proper use and symbolism for the knight-errant. One of the knights-errant is a character named 'Broken Sword' (played by Tony Leung) who practises calligraphy and whose writing of the word *jian* (sword) is presented to the emperor in the hope of inducing a revelation.

The emperor does have a final revelation about the sword, which is that of 'the unity of man and sword' necessitating 'the absence of the sword in both

the hand and the heart'. This is the same revelation at the end of Jimmy Wang Yu's *The Sword*, which is that the sword must stay in its scabbard so that mankind may have peace. But being a tyrant, the emperor cannot have a hand without the sword, and because of this, he attracted many assassins seeking to end his life. In the film, the assassin Nameless, played by Jet Li, manages to get close to the emperor but lets him live so that he could go on to unify the various kingdoms and build a nation – and the assumption is that he is the hero. Yet the hero may well be the Qin emperor who can achieve the highest state of transcendence in the revelation of the sword, namely peace. Qin's lasting legacy is the nation state of China (China being named after him). The controversy which the film has aroused is thus stoked by this central conception of despotism and autocracy as heroic destiny.

Hero came in the wake of two other films about the Qin emperor and the assassins who attempt to kill him, Zhou Xiaowen's *Qin song* (*The Emperor's Shadow*, 1996) and Chen Kaige's *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1998). All three films appear to demonstrate that the Fifth Generation tends to see the *wuxia* genre as historicist-nationalist and that the highest spirit of *xia* is the intertwining of the chivalric principle with the idea of nation. However, it has been pointed out that *The Emperor's Shadow* and *The Emperor and the Assassin* are not strictly speaking *wuxia* films or at least were not yet '*wuxia*-ised' (*wuxia hua*), meaning that both films were still essentially historical period films of the type identified by Mainland critics as *guzhuang baishi pian*, and that it was only until Zhang Yimou's *Hero* that the grand spectacle of history became entangled with the *wuxia* blockbuster.[40]

Both *The Emperor's Shadow* and *The Emperor and the Assassin* are historicist epics sourced from Sima Qian's account of the historical assassins in *Shi ji*. *The Emperor's Shadow* deals with the Qin emperor's relationship with Gao Jianli, a musician who is described in Sima Qian's account as having been blinded by the emperor and who attempted to kill the emperor by striking him with his musical instrument, the *zhu*. In the film, the Qin emperor, Yingzheng, is a childhood companion of Gao Jianli having been wet-nursed by Jianli's mother. Separated, their paths diverge as adults. Yingzheng assumes suzerainty over Qin and goes on to conquer the other kingdoms, while Jianli, a citizen of Yan is taken prisoner by Yingzheng. Appreciative of his talents as a musician, Yingzheng wants Jianli to compose the ultimate ode to Qin eulogising Yingzheng's vision of a unified state. Gao Jianli is not a typical *xia*-assassin (he is in fact not a *xia* at all) and his eventual attempt to kill the emperor is a symbolic action of one who will not submit to a tyrant under any circumstances.

The Emperor and the Assassin does feature a *xia*-assassin, Jing Ke (played by Zhang Fengyi). The film presents parallel stories about the emperor Yingzheng, and the assassin, Jing Ke, culminating in their final encounter where Jing Ke, having been invited to an audience with the emperor as an emissary of the

Kingdom of Yan, attempts to kill Yingzheng with a dagger hidden inside the scroll of a map of Yan. He fails and is instead killed by the emperor. Chen Kaige's portraits of both Yingzheng and Jing Ke bring out the psychopathological dimensions of their characters. Li Xuejian gives a totally captivating performance as Yingzheng, his every gesture and expression betraying a mind haunted by ethical dilemmas that spring from his ruthless use of power. Jing Ke is also portrayed as less of a heroic figure, wracked by guilt over his slaughter of a family and a blind girl.

Hero is not based on Sima Qian's account of the assassins but it portrays several knights-errant and their stories who could have been figures forgotten by the historian. The film essentially reverses Sima Qian's sympathy for the assassins by posing the emperor instead as the sympathetic figure. The emperor outmanoeuvres the assassin Nameless and convinces him of a higher objective: the need to unify all the kingdoms under the rubric of *tianxia* (all under heaven). *Tianxia* is a trope for nation, which could also be an expression of universal peace.[41] In evoking *tianxia*, the ultimate motivation of knights-errant who traditionally fight for revenge or for other more selfish purposes is thereby reformulated.[42] They now fight for a cause which is more political.

Part of the controversy of the film surrounds this notion of *tianxia*, as it relates to the question of heroic destiny and history. *Tianxia*, a historical term, is used to justify China's present form as a nation-state, and completely from the male patriarchal standpoint,[43] but the film is highly ambiguous on the question of heroic destiny.[44] Like *Crouching Tiger*, ambiguity is structured into the narrative of *Hero* though many critics of the film choose simply to reduce its content to an expression of fascist ideology or as an apologia for the dictatorship of the CCP.[45] However, as Jia-xuan Zhang and Jenny Lau have demonstrated, there is more to the film than a purely ideological reading of it may allow.[46] For lack of space, I will not here repeat what Zhang and Lau have already analysed except to simply echo Zhang's point that the 'positive value' of *Hero* is its ambiguity,[47] and note here that the central ambiguity of the film is a function of historicist allegory.

By using the past to reflect upon the present, Zhang Yimou's perspective as well as those of his colleagues in the Fifth Generation who have made *wuxia* films is a heavily historicist one that functions as an allegory of the totalitarian nation and its excesses. *Hero* can therefore be read as an allegory of the truth of so-called official history and official nationalism.[48] Xudong Zhang has given an account of the rise of a 'new, protocivic nationalism' in the social sphere as opposed to the nationalism of the state.[49] Nationalism in this sense is a highly ambiguous discursive space where ruminations by civil society and state-sanctioned discourses vie for meaning. *Hero*'s structure of multiple readings reinforces this space and it emits the message that history is ambiguous and truth is relative.

The space is fundamentally limited but still crucial to the existence of the state,

and in fact is structured as part of the apparatus and architecture of the state.[50] In *Hero*, this limited space is actually given an image to itself. It is that space left behind by Jet Li's assassin after his execution by arrows, and which can be read as a profound signification of personal space in the face of militaristic might. The space here is very pop-symbolic in a cartoonish way but nevertheless significant if we acknowledge its ambiguity in the context of the contemporary politics of China – 'the textual symbolic space is symptomatic of the contemporary political imaginary', as Stephanie Donald asserts.[51] Effectively this means that Chinese filmmakers seek constantly to adjust their judgements of history as an implicit method of rhetoric. In this sense, the view of *wuxia* as a national form may be understood as *wuxia* expressing the 'national' through the historicist function of commentary and allegory – such a function transcends political division by preserving a national form in the abstract.

As part of his abstraction of nationalism, Zhang Yimou relies on orientalist notions of history. *Hero* works out as a variation of the kind of orientalism seen in Puccini's operas *Turandot* and *Madam Butterfly*. Zhang had of course directed *Turandot* for the stage and there are scenes in the Qin emperor's palace in *Hero* that recalls his stage version of the opera. Here the self-orientalism of *Hero* is another means to pander to occidental expectations of the orient as a function of transnational production – or what I have called postmodern orientalism. In this way, the orientalism of *Hero* can be discerned in its colours (red for example as a Chinese colour), décor and costumes. This is orientalism as high fashion, one of the denominators of the high concept blockbuster form adopted by Chinese filmmakers. Fashion is also an unmistakable visual motif in films like Chen Kaige's *The Promise* and Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*.

This practice of high-fashion orientalism is continued in Zhang's next two *wuxia* films, *House of Flying Daggers* and *Curse of the Golden Flower*. Both films are set in the Tang Dynasty, which has become a favourite décor-period for Zhang Yimou and other directors (He Ping's *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* and Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet* are also set in the same period). Fashion and colours appear more commodified and apparently less integrated with the narratives of both films. On an informal level, I have heard many critics expressing disgust at Zhang's fashion and colour imagery in these films. In an essay entitled 'Toward an Ethics of Postvisuality', Rey Chow has raised an interesting problem in connection with Zhang's films, which is that of iconophobia as a form of critical vigilance against Zhang's orientalism.[52] The 'ethics of postvisuality' is a response to iconophobia, but it raises a more general problem of how to address the aesthetics of Zhang's cinema, particularly in the context of his *wuxia* films. Chow admires Zhang's images for their contemplation of 'the materiality of visuality as a social act as well as an objectified event or spectacle'.[53] This visuality is 'deconstructed in the process of its own making' and

the resulting spectacle has the capacity to produce 'an aesthetic rupture, that critical distance from within the bounds of what comes across successfully as a conventional and crowd-pleasing story'.[54]

In Zhang's *wuxia* films, the director's evocation of fashion as high orientalism may well be a process of deconstruction, but does it fall within the realm of an 'ethics of postvisuality'? Unfortunately, Chow does not discuss *Hero* in her essay, instead focusing on *Xingfu shiguang* (*Happy Times*, 2000), a non-*wuxia* film which Chow basically praises as 'a return to cinematic realism and humanism' in Zhang's work.[55] Perhaps Chow believes that postvisuality can only relate to films in the realist-humanist genre where orientalism has less effect. The *wuxia* genre is of course often castigated for its fantasy and wishful thinking but it also prescribes orientalism in its aesthetics. Orientalism may well be a complication in Chow's notion of an ethics of postvisuality in Zhang's cinema if we understand postvisuality as a non-ideological, iconophilic form of seeing. Zhang's images in his *wuxia* films can be more fervently read for their 'implications of vision and visuality' in allegorising the politics of the nation-state and not simply dismissed by the iconophobic response they always seem to elicit. However, one needs to take account of how orientalism is precoded as a component of postvisuality (or is it entirely precluded from postvisuality, deconstructed away?). How one applies the ethics of postvisuality to Zhang's *wuxia* films remains to be examined, a specific project that falls beyond the scope of this volume.

Hero is undoubtedly a milestone in the genre, and a major work in Zhang's career (Chow therefore appears to brush aside *Hero* in her discussion of ethics). *House of Flying Daggers* is, on the other hand, distinctively minor if also a pleasant enough entertainment. Its plot deals with a female assassin Mei (Zhang Ziyi) who is captured by officers of the constabulary (*bukuai*). She is set free by one of the officers as a ruse to lead the government to the new leader of the organisation. Mei falls in love with the officer Jin (Takeshi Kaneshiro). In the meantime, the other officer, Liu (Leo, in the English subtitles, played by Andy Lau) who is in fact a mole planted by the organisation, and Mei's lover, becomes jealous. The film ends in an emotional duel between the two men after the jealous lover has wounded Mei. Love is the justification for action and violence, totally sweeping aside the politics. As such, *House of Flying Daggers* therefore has almost no resonance of historicist allegory, and was perhaps meant as a diversion, after the controversy of *Hero*.

Curse of the Golden Flower on the other hand is a return to active political allegory and the film itself is full of politics of the dysfunctional family kind. The plot, actually derived from a play by Cao Yu performed in the 1930s entitled *Thunderstorm*, is effectively simple: the emperor (Chow Yun-fat) is slowly poisoning the queen (Gong Li) who is sleeping with her stepson, the crown prince; she wants her son with the emperor, Jai (another non-diegetic,

orientalist-sounding name, fabricated to make it rhyme with the first name of actor Jay Chou, who plays the role) to take over the crown and encourages him to stage a coup against his father. In the meantime, the youngest son, feeling neglected, also plots his own coup. This leads to a tragic conclusion as both sons make their moves in uncoordinated fashion on the eve of the Chrysanthemum Festival. Jai's coup is spectacularly staged, with his army clad in golden armour which is then pushed back by the emperor's army clad in grey.

The film sparkles with colours so garish that one might need to wear sunglasses in order to watch it; and the imperial costumes and palace sets are so decadently rich that even coups must be staged with resplendent colours and the blood that is shed is just the colour red complementing the gold and the grey. In contrast, *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers* appear almost restrained. Yet, the orientalist excess of *Curse* in terms of its colours and costumes is an even more potent indictment of authoritarian depravity, as the critic Sek Kei has suggested. He opines that only someone who had gone through the Cultural Revolution could have made such a luxuriously perverse and violent film.[56]

Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*, which is similar to *Curse* in its plot (it is actually based on *Hamlet*) as well as look is less effective in being more consciously elegant and tasteful. Chen Kaige's *The Promise*, again almost similar to *Curse* and also *The Banquet*, is just as flamboyantly orientalist but a total misfire as historicist allegory. It is more potently an allegory on transnationalism and the need to efface the specificities of cultural nationalism and perpetrate culturalist distortions in the service of transnationalism. In fact, the film was received as parody while the filmmakers seemed oblivious of what they had done (in their minds of course, they had produced a serious epic). This gave rise to a phenomenon in China known as *egao* (malicious mischief) when shortly after the film's release in 2005, a videomaker named Hu Ge extracted scenes from the film and reworked its soundtrack to concoct a video spoof entitled *Yige mantou yinfa de xuean* (*The Bloody Case that Started from a Steamed Bun*) and posted it on the internet, to popular acclaim.[57] Chen Kaige took offence and initiated legal proceedings against the videomaker but the incident showed that the audience had moved ahead of Chen in recognising just what the high concept blockbuster in China had spawned – a gross parody of the genre and of history.

Conclusion

This conclusion brings not only this chapter but this book to a close, on a discussion of nationalism and transnationalism as the two prevailing tendencies that either act concurrently or interact across each other to exert an impact on *wuxia* and its development in the first decade of the new millennium. The two tendencies have come into operation just as the Chinese cinema has readopted the genre back into its mainstream, and they appear to foreshadow the rise of

China as a power on the world stage. The grand historicist self-fashioning of the genre in a film like *Hero* and its offshoots *Curse of the Golden Flower*, *The Banquet*, *The Warlords*, *An Empress and the Warriors*, *Red Cliff* demonstrate the kind of nationalistic self-aggrandisement that critics find disturbing, particularly so when the nature of the regime is authoritarian and autocratic, ever ready to invoke militaristic power as the means to their end of a unitary nation state.

However, if we see the *wuxia* genre as a mirror of the nation, it shows China in perpetual crisis, torn apart by internal strife and the urge to cohere as a unitary state. *Hero* perfectly illustrates this perceived crisis of the nation-state which China embodies. The film tells the story of the Qin emperor before he has actually founded the unitary state, and the trope of *tianxia* for the nation-state is basically a Utopian dream. *Tianxia* itself, as Xudong Zhang has noted, 'is a prenationalist or protonationalist notion of an empire, a civilization, and a universe all rolled into one'.[58] In the film, *tianxia* is based on a transcendent revelation that the sword and the mind should be one – a fantasy on the same level as the Zen transfiguration at the end of *A Touch of Zen* and the apocalyptic magical power of the Buddhist relic unleashed at the end of *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* with their messages of transcendent peace for humanity.

Thus the idea of the unified nation state in *Hero* is essentially still a dream, its perceived nationalistic stance an illusion disguised as history. However, *wuxia* functions as wish-fulfilments, and dream visions of transcendence as well as of unified nation states are not to be taken lightly. Those critics who denounce *Hero* as fascist or as an apologia for authoritarianism actually buy into its fantasy of the unified nation state while completely neglecting the fantasy of flying knights-errant fighting for some kind of alternative to tyranny. The critics see the film as an allegory of present-day China but since an allegory is by definition ambiguous, could it not also be an allegory of some form of transcendent state of the nation, a state beyond the nation?

Of late, the genre has gone even further back from the Qin, to the Warring States era, a prenationalist period of division and perpetual war. *An Empress and the Warriors* is set in such a period, depicting a female warrior queen (Kelly Chen) who abolishes war at the end of the film after she has taken revenge on the traitor who killed her father. As a queen, the female warrior appears now to have graduated from being just a simple knight-errant out to avenge the death of the father. The martial, masculine identity of the female knight-errant is now at the service of the state to bring about and ensure peace and non-violence. The film works as an expression of feminine Utopia which seems only possible in a prenationalist moment of *wuxia* dominated by masculine warlords engaged in constant war between states and inner strife within the state.

We may increasingly be seeing *wuxia* as just such a prenationalist articulation of hope and peace. What remains unclear is the real meaning of this

prenationalist odyssey of knight-errantry and its goal beyond. Is the prenationalist equivalent to a kind of postnationalist vision? Is *wuxia* after all a kind of perpetual movement towards a state of transcendence that goes beyond the nation state, as symbolised by the Emperor Qin's revelation of the unity of mind and sword? The postnational, following Partha Chatterjee, is really an issue of 'effective civil society' and 'govermentality' or finding the proper balance between 'state and civil-social institutions'.[59] How is China able to function on a state level without seeing civil society as a threat?

The historical knights-errant which became part of the myth of *wuxia* are the early vanguard of civil society in their own (violent) way. In their interactions with the state, they stand and fight for a cause that can loosely be called postnational. The point here that must be made is that the 'postnational' is still spiritually and physically tied to the 'national'. As Partha Chatterjee emphasises, 'the journey that might take us beyond the nation must first pass through the currently disturbed zones within the nation-state, and that in fact a more satisfactory resolution of the problems within could give us some of the theoretical instruments we are looking for to tackle the questions beyond'.[60]

The idea of the postnational as foreshadowed in the *wuxia* cinema still awaits further investigation but this seems to me to be based on the assumption that the concept of the national is itself progressive and worthy of being taken further into a realm of ideas and possibilities. Nationalism in contemporary China, as Xudong Zhang tells us, 'encompasses a spontaneous popular longing for equality and democracy' but 'it also indicates the limits of its own political realization'.[61] Breaking down the limits is ultimately the purpose of *wuxia* and its visions of the fantastic knight-errant delivering righteous justice and being forever chivalrous.

Notes

1. For an account of *Crouching Tiger*'s success as a 'worldwide cinematic phenomenon', see Christina Klein, '*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*: A Diasporic Reading', *Cinema Journal*, 43:4, Summer 2004, 18–42, esp. p. 18. See also Huaiting Wu and Joseph Man Chan, 'Globalizing Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Global-local Alliance and the Production of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*', *Media Culture Society*, 29:2, 2007, 195–217, esp. p. 196.
2. On 'global–local alliance' see Wu and Chan, 'Globalizing Chinese Martial Arts Cinema'; on 'cultural migrancy', see Felicia Chan, 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Cultural Migrancy and Translatability', in Chris Berry (ed.), *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 56–64.
3. See Hsiao-hung Chang, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Globalization', p. 103.
4. Though the plot elements and the names of characters are similar, it is not clear that *Rape of the Sword* is actually connected to Wang Dulu's novel. It is probably the case that Wang's novel, being enormously popular in its day, provided the generic elements for a script such as that of *Rape of the Sword*.
5. See Leon Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters*, p. 138.

6. See Kenneth Chan, 'The Global Return of the Wu Xia Pian (Chinese Sword-Fighting Movie): Ang Lee's 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'", *Cinema Journal*, 43:4, Summer 2004, 3–17, esp. p. 9.
7. See Rong Cai, 'Gender Imaginations', p. 451.
8. See Christina Klein, '*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*', p. 28.
9. Ibid., p. 34.
10. See Christina Klein, '*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*', p. 34, and Kwai-Cheung Lo, *Chinese Face/Off*, p. 192.
11. See Tze-lan D. Sang, 'The Transgender Body in Wang Dulu's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*', in Martin and Heinrich (ed.), *Embodied Modernities*, pp. 98–112.
12. Ibid., p. 106.
13. For a brief account of the changes made from novel to screenplay, see Jennifer W. Jay, '*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*: (Re)packaging Chinas and Selling the Hybridized Culture in an Age of Transnationalism', in Maria N. Ng and Philip Holden (ed.), *Reading Chinese Nationalisms: Society, Literature, Film* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), pp. 131–142, esp. pp. 134–135. For a synopsis of the novel and further discussion on its plot relating to the main character, see Tze-lan D. Sang, 'The Transgender Body'. See also Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, pp. 195–198.
14. See Stephen Teo, '"We Kicked Jackie Chan's Ass": An Interview with James Schamus', *Senses of Cinema*, issue 13 (April – May 2001), at www.sensesofcinema.com.
15. See Dominique Mainon and James Ursini, *The Modern Amazons: Warrior Women on Screen* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Limelight Editions, 2006), p. 247.
16. See Fran Martin, 'The China Simulacrum: Genre, Feminism, and Pan-Chinese Cultural Politics in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*', in Chris Berry and Feii Lu, *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), pp. 149–159, esp. p. 158. For another take on the feminism angle of the film, see Matthew Levie, '*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*: The Art Film Hidden Inside the Chop-Socky Flick', *Bright Lights*, Issue 33, July 2001, www.brightlightsfilm.com/33/crouchingtiger.html.
17. See Kenneth Chan, 'The Global Return of the Wu Xia Pian', p. 10.
18. See Shu-mei Shih, *Visualtiy and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007). Shih refers to the use of different accents among the pan-Chinese stars as indicative of Lee's fashioning of Sinophone 'visuality and identity' on a transnational level, pp. 2–8.
19. For an account of the financing of *Crouching Tiger*, see Wu and Chan, 'Globalizing Chinese Martial Arts Cinema', pp. 204–205.
20. See Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, p. 184.
21. See Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 171.
22. On the deliberately inconsistent use of Wade – Giles and Pinyin spelling systems, see Kwai-Cheung Lo, *Chinese Face/Off*, p. 179. On the issue of subtitles, see Jennifer W. Jay, '*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*', pp. 138–139.
23. See Arif Dirlik, 'Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism', *History and Theory*, 35:4, December 1996, 96–118, esp. p. 99.
24. See Tze-lan D. Sang, 'The Transgender Body', p. 109.
25. Ang Lee, *et al*., *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Portrait of the Ang Lee Film* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), p. 7.
26. Arif Dirlik, 'Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism', p. 106.

27. Kenneth Chan, 'The Global Return of the Wu Xia Pian', pp. 3–4.
28. See Ken-fang Lee, 'Far Away, So Close: Cultural Translation in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 4:2, 2003, 281–295, esp. p. 281.
29. See Kenneth Chan, 'The Global Return of the Wu Xia Pian', p. 11.
30. See Christina Klein, '*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*', p. 32.
31. See Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, p. 191. The authors provide a breakdown of the film's pacing relating to its action sequences, p. 216.
32. James Schamus, 'Aesthetic Identities: A Response to Kenneth Chan and Christina Klein', *Cinema Journal*, 43:4, Summer 2004, 43–52, esp. p. 45.
33. Ibid., p. 43.
34. For a report on the work of Fourth Generation *wuxia* directors, see Chen Mo, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi*, pp. 226–232.
35. For an account of Fifth Generation film graduates from the Beijing Film Academy, see Paul Clark, *Reinventing China: A Generation and Its Films* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2005).
36. See interview with He Ping in Jia Leilei, *Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi*, p. 290.
37. Said, quoted in Arif Dirlik, 'Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism', p. 97.
38. Ibid., p. 97.
39. See Jia-xuan Zhang, 'Hero', *Film Quarterly*, 58:4, 2005, 47–52, p. 47.
40. See Sek Kei, 'Huangjin jia you zhengzhi yingshe?' ('Is There Political Allegory in *Curse of the Golden Flower*?'), *Mingpao*, 29 December 2006.
41. Wang Yiman gives two visions of *tianxia*, one defined by the emperors and the other by the intellectuals. For the former, *tianxia* signifies power and 'the largest possible territory under their cultural, if not political, control'. For the latter, *tianxia* suggests 'a commitment to civilize the entire human race, regardless of ethnicity and nationality, while assuming the centrality of China and the *han* Chinese'. See Wang Yiman, 'Screening Asia: Passing, Performative Translation, and Reconfiguration', *positions*, 15:2, Fall 2007, 319–343, esp. p. 333.
42. See Chen Mo, *Zhang Yimou de dianying shijie* ('The Cinematic World of Zhang Yimou') (Taipei: Storm and Stress Publishing, 2006), p. 254.
43. For a highly critical analysis of all three Qin emperor and assassin films, see the chapter 'Nanren de gushi' ('A Story of Men') in Dai Jinhua's *Xingbie Zhongguo* ('Gendering China') (Taipei: Rye Field, 2006), pp. 159–198. For an interpretation of the point of view of the female assassin played by Maggie Cheung, see Wang Yiman, 'Screening Asia', pp. 334–335.
44. For a summary of the critical views of critics over *Hero*, see Berry and Farquhar, *China on Screen*, pp. 167–168.
45. See Evans Chan's 'Zhang Yimou's *Hero*: The Temptation of Fascism', originally published online in *Film International*, 2:8, March 2004. See also J. Hoberman's review of *Hero*, 'Man With No Name Tells a Story of Heroics, Color Coordination', in *Village Voice*, 23 August 2004, www.villagevoice.com/ film/0434, hoberman2,56140,20.html. See also Mark Harrison, 'Zhang Yimou's Hero and the Globalisation of Propaganda', *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, 34:2, February 2006, 569–572. Shu-mei Shih gives a somewhat different take on the controversy of *Hero* by attacking it as 'a blatant imperial apologia that rationalizes violence as the means to peace'. See Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, p. 38.
46. See Jia-xuan Zhang, 'Hero', and Jenny Lau, '*Hero*: China's Response to Hollywood Globalization'.
47. See Jia-xuan Zhang, 'Hero', p. 52.
48. In her analysis of a crop of Fifth Generation films, including *Huang tudi* (*Yellow Earth*, 1984), Stephanie Hemelryk Donald makes the point that the Fifth

Generation filmmakers employed a strategy of showing a different perspective on the 'truth' of history which is particularly effective where 'the truth of the past is vital to the legitimacy of a present regime and where the meaning of the nation is mapped onto that version of past events, in order to imbue that legitimacy with an aura of national authenticity'. See Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China* (Lanham, MD, Boulder, CO, New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 23.

49. See Xudong Zhang, 'Nationalism, Mass Culture, and Intellectual Strategies in Post-Tiananmen China', *Social Text*, No. 55, Summer 1998, 109–140, esp. p. 115.
50. On the notion of space as a deterministic element of limited civil society within the imperial boundaries of the state as characterised in the architecture of Beijing's Forbidden City, see Zhu Jianfei, *Chinese Spatial Strategies: Imperial Beijing 1420–1911* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004). On space and civil society, see also Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces*.
51. Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces*, p. 143. Dai Jinhua's critique of *Hero*, on the other hand, asserts the primacy of perspective (invariably male and patriarchal) over space, and that such a perspective reveals the filmmakers choosing to stand unabashedly on the side of 'power, conquest, might' (again, I tend to see this as a highly ideological reading of the film, from the feminist point of view). See *Xingbie Zhongguo* ('Gendering China'), p. 181.
52. See Rey Chow, 'Toward an Ethics of Postvisuality: Some Thoughts on the Recent Work of Zhang Yimou', *Poetics Today*, 25:4, Winter 2004, 673–688, see in particular pp. 676–679.
53. Ibid., p. 679.
54. Ibid., p. 687.
55. Ibid., p. 685.
56. Sek Kei, 'Mancheng jindai huangjin jia guguai' ('The Bizarre *Curse of the Golden Flower*'), *Mingpao*, 27 December 2006.
57. I am indebted to Zhou Yongming for alerting me to the phenomenon of *egao* and its genesis in Hu Ge's spoof of *The Promise*.
58. See Xudong Zhang, 'Nationalism, Mass Culture, and Intellectual Strategies in Post-Tiananmen China', p. 114.
59. See Partha Chatterjee, 'Beyond the Nation? Or within?', *Social Text*, No. 56, Autumn 1998, 57–69, esp. pp. 66–67.
60. Ibid., p. 57.
61. Xudong Zhang, 'Nationalism, Mass Culture, and Intellectual Strategies in Post-Tiananmen China', p. 118.

EPILOGUE

It is only fitting for me to point out that this study of the history of the *wuxia* film genre is inevitably incomplete, and that there are many spaces still left to fill. Some of the omissions are dictated by certain constraints. There are areas and periods I have omitted out of necessity because either the films are lost or that there is simply no critical impetus to study them due to long-held perceptions that they are too minor and that it is just too time-consuming to uncover extant film texts and other research materials. Much of the Cantonese cinema's *wuxia* films of the 1950s and 1960s belong in this category as do the Taiwanese-dialect *wuxia* films produced in Taiwan in the 1960s.

I have also largely omitted the Taiwanese Mandarin cinema's *wuxia* films, essentially for lack of space in this monograph which demands a high degree of selectivity. Thus while I would have liked to write more on the films of Jimmy Wang Yu, Joseph Kuo (the 'Bronzemen' series), Wang Xinglei and Zhang Meijun (who made the first 3-D *wuxia* picture which I first saw when it was released in the late 1970s but which I have never had occasion to see again), it is impossible to cover them all in this volume. Similarly, much of the work in the Hong Kong Mandarin martial arts cinema (by such directors as Huang Feng, Luo Wei, Cheng Gang, Zhang Zengze) is left out simply because it is too voluminous to cover comprehensively. Many of the *wuxia* films, such as those produced by Cathay, are infrequently revived and are not, so far, restored to DVD.

There are still spaces of the early *wuxia* film history in Shanghai which await closure (or perhaps discovery may be the proper word, in that films thought lost from the silent period before the ban on the genre and from the *gudao* period

when the genre was revived, may yet be uncovered). I have also left out an appraisal of the Fourth Generation *wuxia* films in China, as well as the revival of the genre in Mainland China since the 1980s through the trend of co-productions with the Hong Kong and Taiwan film industries. The question of the Chinese audience's reaction to the genre, especially to the fantasy premises of *wuxia*, considering the country's long ban of the genre and the Chinese Communist Party's policy of official atheism, would certainly benefit from further studies and field trips.

The genre's transfiguration as a modern gangster genre, as in the films of John Woo, Johnnie To, Andrew Lau and others, is another field that I have deliberately passed over. Similarly, I am unable to find the space in this volume to fit in more discussions on *wuxia* as the gunfighting 'Western' form, as exemplified by Wai Ka-fai's *Heping fandian* (*Peace Hotel*, 1995) and many other films of that sub-genre set not only in the Chinese west but also on the northern plains with *xia* protagonists using guns instead of swords. These are areas that I may take up for future discussions in other volumes and papers, but it is my hope that other scholars will fill in all the spaces and gaps in the research of the genre. This book may yet prove helpful in that process.

GLOSSARY

bagua 八卦
baihua 白話
baishi 稗史
*bao*報
*baochou*報仇
bei pai 北派
bukuai 捕快
caizi 才子
chaqu 插曲
chuanqi 傳奇
cike 刺客
daoxia 盜俠
Dianying Jiancha Weiyuan Hui
電影檢查委員會
dongchang 東廠
feichang shiqi 非常時期
gan bang 干棒
ge 戈
gong 公
gongan 公安
gongfu 功夫
gudao 孤島
guzhuang baishi pian 古裝稗史片
guzhuang pian 古裝片
haoxia 豪俠
hong quan 洪拳
huaben 話本
huangmei diao 黃梅調
huangse 黃色
huaqiao 華僑
jian 劍
jian ai 兼愛
jianghu 江湖
jianxia 劍俠
jie 節
jiguan 機關
jin gang 金剛
jinzhi 禁制
jiupai 舊派
junzi 君子
juzi 鉅子
li 禮
longhu wushi 龍虎武師
nan pai 南派
nanyang 南洋
nieyuan 孽緣
nüxia 女俠
ouhua 歐化
pu dao 朴刀
*qi*奇
*qi*氣
qigong 氣功
qing 情
qing gong 輕功
qudi 取締
rang 讓

renxia 仁俠
ruanxing dianying 軟性電影
ruxia 儒俠
sengxia 僧俠
shangwu 尚武
Shaolin 少林
shehui yingpian 社會影片
shenguai 神怪
shenguai wuxia 神怪武俠
shisanmei 十三妹
si yi 私義
sijian 私劍
tanci 彈詞
tianxia 天下
weiguo weimin, xia zhi da zhe 為國為民，俠之大者
weijiao 圍剿
*wen*文
wenming xi 文明戲
wu 武
wu junhu 五軍虎
wuda pian 武打片
Wudang 武當
wulin 武林
wusheng 武生
wushu 武術
wushu pian 武術片
wuxia 武俠
wuxia xin shiji 武俠新世紀
wuxing jiao 無形腳
wuyi pian 武藝片
xia yi wu fan jin 俠以武犯禁
Xianü 俠女
xiao 孝
xiao shimin 小市民
xiayi 俠義
xin 信
xin wuxia 新武俠
xing 性
xingxia zhangyi 行俠仗義
xinpai 新派
yang gang 陽剛
yi 義
yingxiong 英雄
yingxiong zhuyi 英雄主義
yinxia 隱俠
yishi shi 異史氏
yixia 義俠
yongxia 勇俠
youxia 遊俠
yuanfen 緣分
yuanyang hudie 鴛鴦蝴蝶
zhen gongfu 真功夫
zhi 止
zhi ge wei wu 止戈為武
zhu 筑
zhong 忠
Zhongyang Dianying Jiancha Weiyuanhui 中央電影檢查委員會

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